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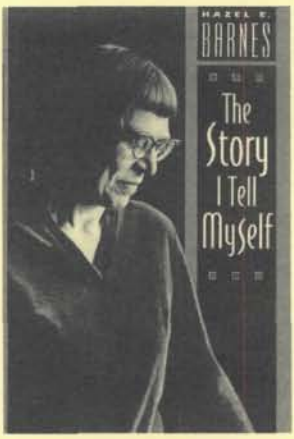

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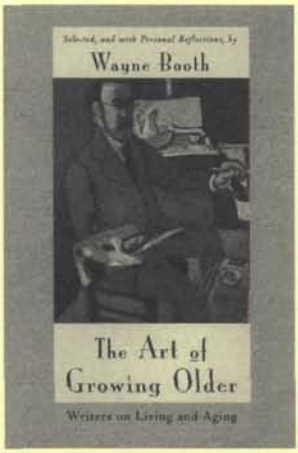

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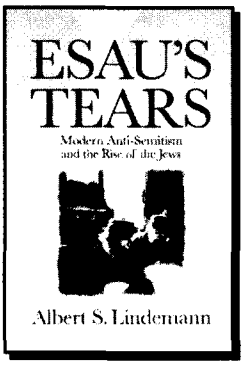

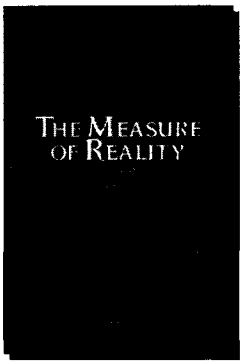

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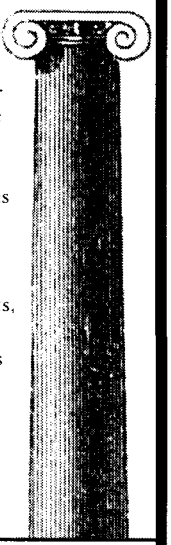

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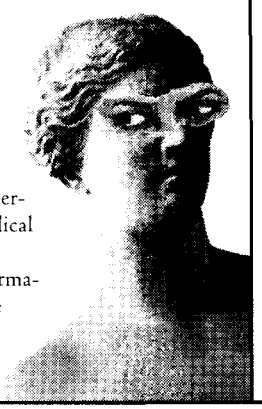

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—RALPH WALDO EMERSON, "The American Scholar," 1837

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The Scholar and the SCHOLAR

In 1837, the Harvard Phi Beta Kappa Society asked the Reverend Jonathan Mayhew Wainwright to deliver the oration at its annual meeting. Had he accepted, it is unlikely that his speech would have provided a name for this or any other journal, since a recent, and typical, Wainwright sermon title was "Inequality of Individual Wealth the Ordinance of Providence, and Essential to Civilization." Fortunately, he said no, and Phi Beta Kappa had to settle for Ralph Waldo Emerson, who gave an address called "The American Scholar." The audience at the Brattle Street Church included Oliver Wendell Holmes, James Russell Lowell, Edward Everett Hale, and plenty of famous people who had only two names. In an exhortation that Holmes was later to call "our Intellectual Declaration of Independence," Emerson urged his listeners to emancipate themselves from Europe's "courtly muses" and establish a vigorous new breed of American scholar. By "scholar" Emerson did not mean "academic" but, as Robert D. Richardson Jr. has put it, "something of what we mean by *student*, something of *intellectual*, and most, perhaps, of what we mean by *writer*." In the pursuit of this scholarship, said Emerson, "life is our dictionary." For copyediting, THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, which took its name from Emerson's speech in 1932, uses the tenth edition of *Webster's Collegiate*, but for inspiration, the original edition of Emerson's dictionary is still in print.

The SCHOLAR's new design is the work of Barbara de Wilde and Abby Weintraub. They may be the first designers in history who not only refrained from fiddling with their journal's size, shape, paper, and cover stock, but also kept the text typeface, New Baskerville. The display typeface is Mrs. Eaves, a font based on types by the eighteenth-century printer John Baskerville, and named after the woman who was first his housekeeper, then his wife. The SCHOLAR will not usually publish illustrations. The acrylic paintings by Jessy Park, the subject of Clara Claiborne Park's essay "Exiting Nirvana," are here for the simple reason that if I read the piece and didn't have the chance to see the artist's work for myself, I would be desperately curious. Jessy Park wrote her own captions.

A. F.

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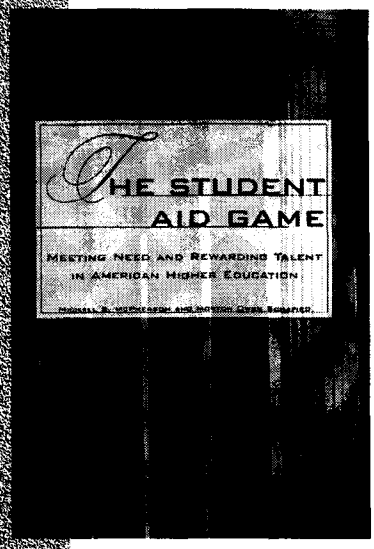

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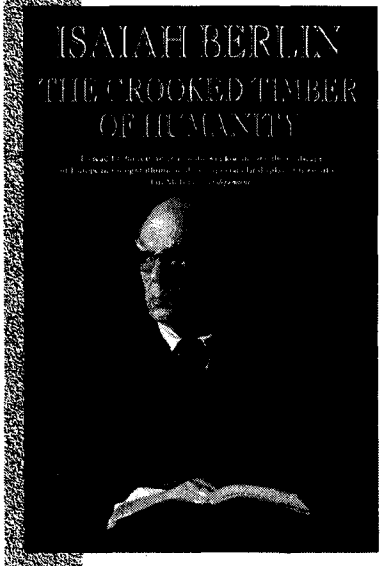

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AT LARGE AND AT SMALL

Collecting Nature

PHILONOË

The net was green. The handle was wood, and the grip was uncomfortably thick, like that of a tennis racket borrowed from an older player. The mesh bag was long enough that if we caught a tiger swallowtail—or a spicebush swallowtail, or a mourning cloak, or a European cabbage, or a common sulphur, or a red admiral, or a painted lady, or a monarch, or a viceroy—we could, with a twist of the wrist, flip its tapered tip over the wire rim and trap the butterfly inside.

Then, being careful not to scrape off the colored scales, we pinched the wings shut and transferred the butterfly to the killing jar. (Our bible, *A Field Guide to the Butterflies of North America, East of the Great Plains*, by Alexander B. Klots, recommended a more complicated method of transfer that involved holding the handle between one's thighs, grasping the bag just below the butterfly, slipping the jar into the net, and coaxing the butterfly inside it. But this technique demanded a prodigious level of coordination—on the order, say, of that displayed by the Cat in the Hat when he balanced a goldfish bowl on an umbrella while standing on a rubber ball—and we were never able to master it.) My brother and I had started with a shallow plastic container, like a petri dish, which came in the children's butterfly kit that we had rapidly outgrown, but because the hindwing projections of the swallowtails tended to get crushed against the perimeter, we graduated to a large glass jar from which our mother had scrubbed the last traces of strawberry jam. At the bottom of the killing jar was a piece of cotton saturated with carbon tetrachloride.

"Carbon tet," we called it, not because it was easier to pronounce—we collected long words as eagerly as we did butterflies—but because the nickname suggested that we and it were on familiar terms, as was indeed the case. Thirty years later a friend of mine dabbed some spot remover on a sofa, and I instantly recognized the smell of the killing jar. During the fifties, when my brother and I started chasing butterflies, potassium cyanide was still in use as well, but because it is a deadly poison, Professor Klots recommended liquid carbon tetrachloride, which is "not very poisonous unless inhaled deeply," and which we persuaded our parents was as innocuous as smelling salts. The butterfly would flutter for a few moments, sink to the bottom of the jar, and slowly expire.

The murder was less grisly than it would have been in, say, 1810, when insect specimens were dispatched by pinching the thorax, stabbing them with a pin, asphyxiating them over the flame of a sulphur match, or skewering them with a red hot wire. Around 1820, the vogue in Europe was the "stifling box," a sealed container submerged in boiling water. The killing jar was introduced in the 1850s, after the royal physician used chloroform to ease the delivery of Queen Victoria's seventh child, and net-wielding country vicars across Great Britain realized they could amass their collections of marbled whites and Camberwell beauties without overt violence; they could simply anesthetize their specimens to death.

The problem with chloroform, as with potassium cyanide and carbon tetrachloride, is that these poisons freeze the butterfly's muscles into an extreme version of rigor mortis, and the wings cannot be spread. My brother and I therefore popped the corpse into a "relaxing jar"—now there's a euphemism right up there with Orwell's Ministry of Peace—that dampened it into pliancy, whereupon it could be pinned to the spreading board, a balsa rectangle with a groove down the center that allowed the wings to be flattened without squashing the

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thorax and abdomen. Caught, killed, relaxed, and spread, the butterfly was laid to rest in a Riker mount, a shallow glass-topped box filled with absorbent cotton—a sort of mass grave for soldiers who had given their lives on the battlefields of suburban Connecticut.

When did we realize that this was horrible? My brother, Kim, and I had started collecting butterflies when he was eight and I was six. Shame set in about two years later. I remember a six-month period of painful overlap, when the light of decency was dawning but the lure of sin was still irresistible. Like alcohol, nicotine, or heroin, lepidoptery is hard to renounce. A tiger swallowtail is an unbelievable thing to find in your back yard: a *big* butterfly, five inches across, striated with yellow and black, with blue splotches on the hindwings rendered iridescent by light-diffracting scales—"like the colors," wrote Professor Klots in a memorably lyrical passage, "produced by a glass prism, the blue of the sky, the spectrum of the rainbow, and an oil film on water." Who would not wish to take such a creature home? To glimpse something so gaudily tropical, more like a quetzal than a sparrow, on your own home ground; to pursue it across the lawn, down the stone steps, around the two topiary peacocks that stood guard over the wading pool, and along the flower border, until it lit on a snapdragon or a delphinium; to swoop your net through the air and see something fluttering inside; to snatch that bit of life from the rich chaos of nature into your own comparatively lackluster world, which it instantly brightened and enlarged; to look it up in Klots and name it and *know* it—well, after you did that a few times, it was hard to muster much enthusiasm for Parcheesi.

"The next two days were so wet and windy that there was no going out," wrote Alfred Russel Wallace in 1869, about a collecting trip to the Aru Islands north of Australia:

> [B]ut on the succeeding one the sun shone brightly, and I had the good fortune to capture one of the most magnificent insects the world contains, the great bird-winged butterfly, Ornithoptera poseidon. I trembled with excitement as I saw it coming majestically towards me, and could hardly believe I had really succeeded in my stroke till I had taken it out of the net and was gazing, lost in admiration, at the velvet black and brilliant green of its wings, seven inches across, its golden body, and crimson breast. It is true I had seen similar insects in cabinets at home, but it is quite another thing to capture such oneself—to feel it struggling between one's fingers, and to gaze upon its fresh and living beauty, a bright gem shining out amid the silent gloom of a dark and tangled forest. The village of Dobbo held that evening at least one contented man.

Few people read Wallace any more, even though he founded the science of island biogeography and, independent of Darwin, evolved a theory of natural selection. A few years ago I borrowed a 1902 edition of one of his books from a large university library and noticed that it had last been checked out in 1949. But he has long been a favorite of mine, in part because no one has ever done a better job of capturing the febrile excitement one feels on netting a really beautiful specimen. And unlike the editor of a 1975 book on butterflies—who, when he quoted this passage, squeamishly omitted the phrase "to feel it struggling between one's fingers"—Wallace made no bones about how crucial the violence was to the thrill.

While Wallace was chasing butterflies in the Malay Archipelago, thousands of his compatriots back home in England were doing the same thing. A special butterfly net was even invented that, when folded, looked exactly like an umbrella, so that one could take it on a stroll without attracting undue attention. (As the British historian David Elliston Allen has pointed out, one did look rather a fool if it started to rain and one's umbrella remained obstinately furled.) Sunday afternoons, after church, were a favorite time for entomology, which was considered a highmindedly Christian pursuit. An 1843 pamphlet entitled *Instructions for Collecting, Rearing, and Preserving British & Foreign Insects*—it now reposes in an envelope in the Library of Congress, as fragile as a sheaf of butterfly wings—begins with the following words:

> The contemplation of the works of the CREATOR is the highest delight of the rational mind. In them we read, as in a volume fraught

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> with endless wonders, the unlimited power and goodness of that BEING, who, in the formation of Atoms, and of Worlds, has alike displayed unfathomable Wisdom. There are few objects in Nature which raise the mind to a higher degree of admiration, than the Insect creation. Their immense numbers—endless variety of form—astonishing metamorphoses—exceeding beauty—the amazing minuteness of some, and the complex and wonderful organization of others, far exceeding that of the higher animals—all tend to prove an Almighty artificer, and inspire astonishment and awe!

I sympathize with these views. When I was in high school, an evangelical Christian friend attempted to rouse me from my agnosticism by asking, "Isn't there *anything* that seems so miraculous it simply has to be by design?" I answered, "Butterfly metamorphosis." I knew it was explainable by rational principles, but it still seemed to hold an irreducible spark of divinity. When Brahma watched the caterpillars in his vegetable garden change into pupae, and thence into butterflies, he was filled with the certainty that he, too, would attain perfection in a future incarnation. Brahma, however, was content to observe the works of the CREATOR, whereas the author of the 1843 pamphlet (using methods he detailed in a thirteen-page chapter called "On killing and preserving Insects in general") believed he could appreciate them most fully only if he did them in.

Any parent of a small child is familiar with the ineluctable impulse to own that which one admires. It is why my husband and I used to tell our daughter, before she was old enough to be so easily duped, that F.A.O. Schwarz was a toy *museum*. When we were very young, my brother and I could not yet divorce our ardor for butterflies from our desire to flatten them in Riker mounts and hang them on the wall. Distinguishing the two required an unchildlike conjunction of self-control and guilt: the sort of moral conversion, for example, that might transform a trophy hunter into a wildlife photographer. We threw away our killing jar not because we wished to stop causing pain—crushing an ant or a cockroach, which presumably had a nervous system similar to that of a tiger swallowtail, stirred few qualms—but because, unlike Alfred Russel Wallace, we grew uneasy with the pleasure it gave us.

During the period of withdrawal, when we still caught butterflies but were ashamed of enjoying it, a luna moth settled on the grille of the air conditioner that was bolted into the window of our father's dressing room, on the second floor of our house. If you have ever seen a luna moth—pale green, hindwings tapering to long slender tails, antennae like golden feathers—you have not forgotten it. It was a hot, humid, firefly-filled summer night, and Kim and I were sitting outside on the front lawn. The light from the house illuminated the moth with a spectral glow. We could not reach it from the ground. We could not open the window from inside. I cannot remember ever desiring anything so much.

All children collect things, of course, but the difference between collecting stamps and collecting butterflies is that you do not have to kill the stamps. Also—and this casts lepidoptery in a slightly more favorable light—the rarity of certain species of insects can be naturally experienced, whereas the rarity of stamps must be looked up in a book. A child knows that a common sulphur is less precious than a luna moth because she has seen thousands of the former and only one of the latter, but how could she guess that an 1856 British one-penny rose is worth a dollar and an 1856 British Guiana one-penny magenta is worth $935,000?

I once read a book on collecting that included photographs of collectors of toilet paper, Weetabix boxes, and airsickness bags. They were all male and all nerdy-looking. My father's first cousin, William James Sidis—a child prodigy who knew Greek and Latin at three, entered Harvard at eleven, and ended up an ill paid back-office clerk—collected streetcar transfers, of which he eventually accumulated more than two thousand. Billy Sidis was nerdy, too, as well as deeply unhappy. Surely the desire to collect inanimate objects with no intrinsic beauty or meaning, as opposed to paintings or books or antique Chinese snuff bottles, reflects a yawning lack of self-confidence. All collecting is a form of spuriously easy mastery, but it is almost unbearably pathetic that a man of Sidis's ability was so in-

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capable, in either his work or his hobby, of picking something anywhere near his own size.

Collecting insects is less pathetic than collecting streetcar transfers, but most people would consider it more sinister. Is it surprising that the revolutionist Jean-Paul Marat, the author of a 1790 pamphlet advocating that "five or six hundred heads be cut off," was an amateur lepidopterist? Is it entirely a coincidence that Alfred Kinsey, before he collected 18,000 sexual histories (along with innumerable nudist magazines, pornographic statues, and pieces of sadomasochistic paraphernalia), collected tens of thousands of gall wasps? Was it not inevitable that John Fowles should have made Frederick Clegg, who collected a beautiful art student and imprisoned her in his cellar, a collector of butterflies as well? I read *The Collector* when I was sixteen, and I got a perverse insider's thrill when Frederick drugged Miranda with chloroform and carbon tetrachloride, both of which he had previously used in his killing bottle to drug fritillaries and blues.

But on the other side of the scale—and I believe he carries enough weight to outbalance an entire army of lepidopteran weirdos—there is Vladimir Nabokov. It is my view that if you have never netted a butterfly, you cannot truly understand Nabokov. This, of course, may be merely a rationalizion, the ignoble offspring of my desire to believe that the tiger swallowtails of my misspent youth did not die in vain. Only Nabokov, eloping at age ten with a nine-year-old girl in Biarritz, would have taken, as the sum total of his luggage, a folding butterfly net in a brown paper bag. Nabokov chased butterflies on two continents for six decades; spent seven years as a Research Fellow in Entomology at Harvard; discovered several new species and subspecies, including *Cyclargus erembis* Nabokov and *Neonympha maniola* Nabokov; and wrote twenty-two articles on lepidoptera, including a 1951 review of my own Alexander B. Klots in the *New York Times Book Review*. (He called it "wonderfully stimulating.")

In a 1931 story called "The Aurelian"—an archaic term for butterfly collector—Nabokov describes a butterfly shop in Berlin whose windows are full of "eyed wings wide-open in wonder, shimmering blue satin, black magic." To the right of the shop there are a tobacconist, a delicatessen, and a fruit seller. To the left there are stores that sell soap, coal, and bread. This is how Nabokov viewed butterflies. One may progress through life surrounded on all sides by drabness, but if there are butterflies at the center, there will never be a want of beauty or romance. What more appropriate passion could a writer have? Lepidopterists, more than naturalists of any other stripe, have long inclined toward the literary, as one can tell from looking at the names they have given the objects of their study. There are butterflies named after Homer, Catullus, Martial, Juvenal, Propertius, and Persius; after dozens of characters in Greek and Roman mythology; and even after several marks of punctuation—the question mark, the long dash, and the comma. (Nabokov described the comma in a famous passage about listening to his governess read French classics on the veranda of the family estate outside St. Petersburg, while his imagination was joyfully diverted by the comma-like markings on a butterfly that had settled on the threshold.)

Many of the themes in Nabokov's fiction—metamorphosis and flight, deception and mimicry, evasion and capture—are lepidopteran. And to my ear, his very language is too. The first canto of *Pale Fire* contains, within its four-and-a-half-page compass, the words *torquated, stillicide, shagbark, vermiculated, preterist, iridule,* and *lemniscate.* Nabokov collected rare words, just as he collected rare butterflies, and when he netted one, especially in the exotic landscape of his second language, his satisfaction is as palpable as if he had finally captured the brown and white hairstreak that once eluded him when he was a boy. Nabokov's style is not just poetic; it is taxonomic. He mentions with something close to hatred the village schoolmaster who, taking his charges for a nature walk, used to quash young Vladimir's hunger for precision by saying "Oh, just a small bird—no special name." And what scorn Nabokov bears for *us,* his clueless audience, when he writes, "I had found last spring a dark aberration of Sievers' Carmelite (just another gray moth to the reader)."

Phase Two of my life as a collector—again, one shared with my older and wiser brother—was an intemperate, catholic, and nonmurderous surrender to the urge to iden-

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tify the small bird and the gray moth. If catching was the central theme of our childhood, curating—classifying, labeling, sorting, arranging, displaying—was the central theme of our adolescence. Butterflies were the slender wedge that opened up something much larger: an earnest attempt to stuff the entire natural world, down to the last kingdom, phylum, class, order, family, genus, and species (I can still rattle these off in the proper sequence, having learned the mnemonic "King Philip, Come Out For God's Sake" at age twelve) into our spare bedroom. It never occurred to us that it would not fit.

The spare bedroom, on the southwest corner of the second floor of our house in Los Angeles, to which we had moved when I was eight and Kim was ten, had a sign on the door that read:

THE SERENDIPITY MUSEUM OF NATURE
NO SMOKING, PLEASE

The sign was embossed in blue with a Dymo Labelmaker, than which there was no more perfect gift, circa 1963, for a pair of children who were crazy about naming things. I am not quite sure why our parents turned over this room to us, nor why they let us hammer pieces of whale baleen into the striped tan wallpaper, nor why they permitted us to fill the bathroom with dirt in order to accommodate our pet California king snake. All I can say is that I am profoundly grateful that they did.

In *Our Mutual Friend*, Silas Wegg visits a shop belonging to "Mr. Venus, Preserver of Animals and Birds, Articulator of human bones." Mr. Wegg is there because—could anyone but Dickens ever come up with this one?—he wishes to retrieve his leg, which Mr. Venus purchased, for potential inclusion in a skeleton, from the hospital in which it was amputated. "I shouldn't like," says Wegg, "to be what I may call dispersed, a part of me here, and a part of me there, but should wish to collect myself as a genteel person." (Mr. Wegg may thus be the only collector who has ever collected himself. He does get his leg back, though not until later in the book; it arrives under Mr. Venus's arm, carefully wrapped, looking like "a sort of brown paper truncheon.") Mr. Venus shows Mr. Wegg around the shop. "Bones, warious," he explains.

> Skulls, warious. Preserved Indian baby. African ditto. Bottled preparations, warious. Everything within reach of your hand, in good preservation. The mouldy ones a-top. What's in those hampers over them again, I don't quite remember. Say, human warious. Cats. Articulated English baby. Dogs. Ducks. Glass eyes, warious. Mummied bird. Dried cuticle, warious. Oh, dear me! That's the general panoramic view.

The general panoramic view of the Serendipity Museum of Nature was similarly warious. It bore a far closer resemblance to Mr. Venus's shop, or to a seventeenth-century *Wunderkammer* crammed from top to bottom with miscellaneous natural curiosities, than it did to any museum we had actually seen.

We displayed not only things that had once been alive but things that had once held life: the discarded skin of a garter snake, the exoskeleton of a cicada, the speckled egg of a scrub jay, the pendant nest of a Baltimore oriole. Blowfish were suspended from the ceiling on strands of dental floss. In the southeast corner, pinned to the wall, were scraps of fur—leopard, tiger, polar bear, rabbit, otter, nutria, mink—left over from coats tailored by a local furrier. Next to them was a man-size piece of styrofoam into which we had stuck hundreds of feathers. On the west wall we had nailed a desiccated sand shark, which looked like a crucified demon. Shelves and card tables held, among other things, a stuffed mouse, a stuffed bat, the skeleton of a pit viper, a hornet's nest, a mounted ostrich egg, a hunk of petrified wood, the fossils of ammonites and foraminifers, several dried salamanders, a dead tarantula, three dead scorpions, a sperm whale tooth, a box of our own baby teeth, the foot of an egret, a pickled squid, a pickled baby octopus, and a pickled human tapeworm, about which I am said to have exclaimed, when I received it on my tenth birthday, "Just what I always wanted!" There were also about a dozen bird and mammal skulls that we had retrieved from road kills and cleaned with Clorox. (Pending their Clorox baths, our mother permitted us to wrap the corpses in aluminum foil and store them in the freezer, as long as we

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labeled them clearly enough to prevent her from confusing them with dinner.)

Our old Riker mounts hung on the south wall, but the tiger swallowtails were fading. Our new passion was shells, which we housed in a huge metal cabinet, typing the genera on little slips of paper and gluing them to the drawer fronts. In conchology, as a mid-nineteenth-century British magazine observed, "there is no cruelty in the pursuit, the subjects are so brightly clean, so ornamental to a boudoir." It is true that on the Florida island where we spent our spring vacations, we did occasionally collect live king's crown conchs, boil them, extract the animals, and clean the shells with muriatic acid. (Being trusted with dangerous substances was a continuing theme throughout our childhood.) But it was more sporting, and more fun, to walk along the beach and, among the jetsam of broken cockles and clams, to spot a banded tulip, an alphabet cone, an apple murex, or (great find of my youth!) an angulate wentletrap.

Last week I was reminiscing about our museum with my brother, who is now a natural history teacher in Wyoming. Kim said, "When you collect nature, there are two moments of discovery. The first comes when you find the thing. The second comes when you find the name." Few pleasures can equal those of the long summer afternoons we spent sitting on the floor in a patch of sunlight, our shell guides spread out before us, trying to identify a particular species of limpet or marginella—and finally, with a whoop of delight, succeeding. Without classification, a collection is just a hodgepodge. Taxonomy, after all—and I think we unconsciously realized this, even as teenagers—is a form of imperialism. During the nineteenth century, when British naval surveys were flooding London with specimens to be classified, inserting them into their proper niches in the Linnaean hierarchy had strong political overtones. Take a bird or a lizard or a flower from Patagonia or the South Seas, perhaps one that has had a local name for centuries, re-christen it with a Latin name, and presto! It has become a tiny British colony. That's how Kim and I felt, too. To name was to assert dominion.

"You're like a miser," Miranda says to her captor in *The Collector*. "You hoard up all the beauty in these drawers. . . . I hate people who collect things, and classify things and give them names." That's the popular notion, all right. Even my husband finds it a wee bit pathological when he finds me taking the shells *he* has collected and arranging them in rows, by species. But I believe it is no accident that the three greatest biological theorists of the nineteenth century—Alfred Russel Wallace; Henry Walter Bates, who developed the theory of mimicry; and Charles Darwin—were all, at their cores, collectors. Wallace, who collected plants as a boy, returned from the Malay Archipelago with 125,660 "specimens of natural history," mostly insects. Bates, who collected bugs as a boy, returned from the Amazon with 14,712 different *species*, again mostly insects, of which eight thousand were previously undiscovered. When he was a boy, Darwin collected coins, postal franks, pebbles, minerals, shells, birds' eggs, and, above all, in the days when "to beetle" was an infinitive, hundreds of specimens of the order Coleoptera. His zeal was such that once, with a rare beetle in each hand, he spied a third species, and popped the beetle in his right hand into his mouth. He later sent home from South America box after box of specimens—birds, mammals, reptiles, insects, fish—that he had skinned and stuffed and pickled while fighting terrible seasickness in the *Beagle*'s poop cabin. It was not enough just to *see* the Galapagos finches; he had to *collect* them, and get help classifying them, and compare their beaks back home in England, before he was able to develop the theory of the origin of species.

All nature collectors share a particular set of tastes and skills: pattern recognition; the ability to distinguish anomaly from norm; the compulsion to order experience. A few of them also have brilliant imaginations, as well as what Darwin called the capacity for "grinding general laws out of large collections of facts." *Collections* of facts. Those of us who lack the latter two abilities will never change the course of science, but when we invite a new shell or butterfly into our lives, we are doing a part of what Darwin did. And lest the primacy of the collecting instinct be underestimated, let us reflect that Darwin was never able to remember for more than a few days a single date or a line of poetry, but at age sixty-seven, he wrote, apropos the beetles of his youth, "I can remember

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the exact appearance of certain posts, old trees and banks where I made a good capture."

We sold the Serendipity Museum of Nature. My brother and I were off to college, our parents were moving to a smaller house, we thought it was time to grow up, and . . . well, we just did it. We put an ad in the *Los Angeles Times*, and over the course of a weekend, a stream of strange people walked underneath the blowfish and took away the pit viper skeleton and the desiccated sandshark and the pickled human tapeworm. The things we prized most, because we had found them ourselves, were worthless. I remember jamming dozens of birds' nests into plastic garbage bags. I was almost seventeen; it was the last day of my childhood.

Thank heavens, we kept the shells, because they were small and easily stored. Today they rest inside a wooden cabinet in the home of our elderly parents, who surprised us a few years ago by moving to the Florida island where we had collected the shells in the first place. When I visit, I still cannot resist picking up the odd murex or limpet when I walk along the beach. They do not have the same meaning they once did, but, as Swann said in *Remembrance of Things Past*, "even when one is no longer attached to things, it's still something to have been attached to them."

Three years ago, I found a 1951 edition of *A Field Guide to the Butterflies of North America, East of the Great Plains*, by Alexander B. Klots, in a secondhand store in upstate New York. There was a stamp on the school library bookplate that said DISCARDED. Discard *Klots*? How could anyone do that? I suppose for the same reason that I once discarded Klots myself: because there wasn't room. When I was younger, I didn't know what I wanted from life, so I wanted everything—new experiences, tiger swallowtails, egrets' feet. Now that I have collected a family, a home, a profession, and a few thousand books, my New York City apartment and my life are full. Before my husband's last birthday, I sent for a copy of the Carolina Biological Supply Company catalogue so I could buy him a flower press. I felt the old thirst when I read about the tarantula spiderling kit, $49.95; the owl pellets, "fumigated and individually wrapped," $3.20; the live salamander larvae, $11.45 a dozen; the slime mold box, "preferred by professional slime mold collectors" (a lovely phrase, as I had never thought of it as a profession), $5.80. I knew, however, that I would never order these things. There isn't room.

My favorite Nabokov story, "Christmas," is about a man named Sleptsov who has recently lost his son, a butterfly collector. In an agony of suicidal grief, Sleptsov looks through his son's belongings—spreading boards, specimen files, a net that still smells of summer and sun-hot grass. Suddenly, from the biscuit tin in which it had been stored, the dormant cocoon of a great *Attacus* moth, stirred into life by the unaccustomed heat, bursts open. A wrinkled black creature the size of a mouse crawls out and starts slowly unfurling its wings. As soon as he witnesses this miracle, Sleptsov knows he must stay alive. This is a story about lepidoptery, but it is also a story about parenthood. One reason we have children, I think, is to experience through them the miracle of the *Attacus* moth: to learn that parts of ourselves we had given up for dead are merely dormant, and that the old joys can re-emerge, fresh and new and in a completely different form, from their chrysalis.

I have two children. Henry, who is three, owns three rubber caterpillars—a black swallowtail, a pipevine swallowtail, and a zebra heliconian. I know their species because he likes to match them up with the pictures in Klots, which now sits on a shelf in his bedroom. Henry is at an age when anything seems possible, and the other night, having just looked at a diagram of metamorphosis, he saw a housefly crawling across the ceiling and said, with dreamy excitement, "Maybe that fly will turn into a stag beetle!"

Susannah is eight. When she was six, we gave her a kit containing five painted lady caterpillars. She watched them pupate. After they broke out of their chrysalises as fully formed butterflies, she carried them in a net enclosure from our cramped apartment to a nearby garden. Then she loosened the net and let them go.

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COMMONPLACE BOOK

How Writers Work

COLLECTED BY ANDRÉ BERNARD

The end of L[ord] J[im] has been pulled off with a steady drag of 21 hours. I sent wife and child out of the house (to London) and sat down at 9 A.M. with a desperate resolve to be done with it. Now and then I took a walk round the house, out at one door in at the other. Ten-minute meals. A great hush. Cigarette ends growing into a mound similar to a cairn over a dead hero. Moon rose over the barn, looked in at the window and climbed out of sight. Dawn broke, brightened. I put the lamp out and went on, with the morning breeze blowing the sheets of MS. all over the room. Sun rose. I wrote the last word. . . .

—JOSEPH CONRAD
Letter to John Galsworthy, July 1900

It's a grim sort of pleasure, but pen, paper and ink and midnight vigils make me happier than sleep or rest. In short I droop and suffer when I am not writing; and, strangely enough, toiling in calm I find calm in toil . . . for when I am bent over a paper, tiring my eyes and fingers, I feel neither heat nor cold, I seem to be wrapped in a soft blanket, I hate to be torn away, and I persist despite the rebellion of my limbs. When I am absolutely forced to stop I feel tired for the first time, and I call a halt to my labors about as eagerly as a lazy and overloaded ass when commanded to climb a rough mountain pass. . . . Isn't it true that the itch for writing, like other itches, is incurable, as Juvenal says? Let me add that the disease is contagious.

—PETRARCH
Letter to Pierre d'Auvergne, November 1352

I had a ritual once of lighting a candle and writing by its light and blowing it out when I was done for the night . . . also kneeling and praying before starting. . . . You think out what actually happened, you tell friends long stories about it, you mull it over in your mind, you connect it together at leisure, then when the time comes to pay the rent again you force yourself to sit at the typewriter and get it over with as fast as you can. . . . Writing *The Subterraneans* in three nights was really a fantastic athletic feat as well as mental, you shoulda seen me after I was done. I was pale as a sheet and had lost fifteen pounds and looked strange in the mirror.

—JACK KEROUAC
Conversation with Ted Berrigan, 1967

I've tried not to confuse my life with any other duties but writing. I work in my own house on the second floor in a set of small maid's rooms, from 8:30 or 9:00 to 12:00 every day, and try to return in the afternoon. I use a word processor for essays and letters, but write all my novels in longhand. Writing by hand makes you more apt to hear the inner voice. The silence of writing by hand makes it easier to let your imagination pick up. You can hear your characters talk better.

—JOHN UPDIKE
Conversation with André Bernard, 1995

Underneath my writing table is a bottle of Gordon's Gin and a syphon of seltzer. Life is difficult and I must keep up. My body appears to be made of heavy, wet leather & my nerves & joints of rusty wires and irons.

—THEODORE DREISER
Letter to H. L. Mencken, August 1924, while writing An American Tragedy

He has some needs and his books could not be produced without those being satisfied. The first is absolute quiet—both in and out of the house; the slightest noise disturbs him and my experience has been that it is the most difficult condition to procure. Long before our marriage J. G. had Fellow's rooms in Nevile's Court and had to give them [up] and

André Bernard, the Executive Editor of Harcourt Brace & Co., is the author of *Now All We Need Is A Title* and the forthcoming *Reader's Guide to Modern American Writing Since 1945*. "Commonplace Book," a collection of gleanings on various themes, will be a regular feature of the SCHOLAR.

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to take rather undergraduate's rooms as his neighbours in Nevile's Court poked the fire inconveniently. . . . The second of J. G.'s needs is space for his library—another very serious condition—so serious that while in Trinity (Great Court) writing the first edition of the G. Bough—also before our marriage—he was asked *not* to put any more weight of books on the floors—I myself saw the ceiling below him looking like an inflated sail.

—LILLY FRAZIER
Letter to Edmund Gosse, June 25, 1910, on Sir James Frazier

I'm tormenting myself, scratching myself. My novel is having a frightful time getting started. I have abscesses of style, I itch with sentences that never appear. What a heavy oar the pen is, and what a difficult current ideas are to row in! I'm so disconsolate about the whole thing that I greatly enjoy it. . . . I have written one page and sketched three others. In a fortnight I hope to have ploughed the first furrow; but the tone in which I am steeping myself is so new to me that I keep opening my eyes in astonishment.

—GUSTAVE FLAUBERT
Letter to Louise Colet, 1851, while writing Madame Bovary

I was thinking: you must come [to Corfu] about the tenth of September; it will be very quiet and quite new to you. Drop everything and leave someone in charge of your mail. Just wrap *Capricorn* in a red wool shawl and bring your portable along with you. I can give you a deep cool room with two windows over the sea, bright rugs on the floor, a desk and some books, an encyclopaedia and dictionary. Bring a woman with you too; that would make it an even keel for the days which come and go quite silently. We could sail and bathe in the mornings, have a fine sunny lunch with wine, then a long afternoon siesta, bathe before tea and then four hours' work in a slow rich evening.

—LAWRENCE DURRELL
Letter to Henry Miller, August 1938

If I could I'd just die inside, let the heart-soul shrink like a prune, and only to this typewriter, let out the truth. I feel awfully alone—crying in the bathroom so no one need hear—crying over these keys, where they sit as patient as an old granny. Can I save myself? I can try. I can keep right on trying. Granny, you electric Smith Corona heart, you buzz back at me, and I pray you do not break.

—ANNE SEXTON
"Confessional Statement," December 29, 1973

The King accosted me with a pleasing look: "How does the writing go?" Boswell: "Pretty well, Sir." King: "When will you be done?" Boswell: "It will be some time yet." . . . Had for I think twelve days not written one line of Johnson's *Life*. Was quite idle and dissipated.

—JAMES BOSWELL
Journal, May 1787

Monday I wrote out most of the substance and it came to about four pages. I saw Monday that I did not have quite what I wanted; so Tuesday I wrote it over and got to about six pages. Wednesday I saw that three of those pages had better come out, I could say that to better effect after I had said something else, which I hadn't yet said, so I said that. Thursday I had four pages plus the three that I wanted later, and it was now necessary to rewrite from the beginning because of the something-else which I had to lead up to. Friday I was able to put it together, doing the whole section over again in the revised order, changing some things, put in (though modified) what I had held out, where I thought it ought to be; and then I had ten pages, though I was actually, in my overall progress, no farther along with the story than I was Monday at noon.

—JAMES GOULD COZZENS
Letter to Bertha Cozzens, October 13, 1946, while writing Guard of Honor

Dear Sir: My husband asks me to send you his answers to your questions of December 27th:

1. Pencil
2. Anyhow
3. Anywhere
4. It finds me

—VÉRA NABOKOV
Letter, March 3, 1964, to Ernest Kay, who had inquired how Vladimir Nabokov wrote, when he wrote, where he wrote, and how he found inspiration

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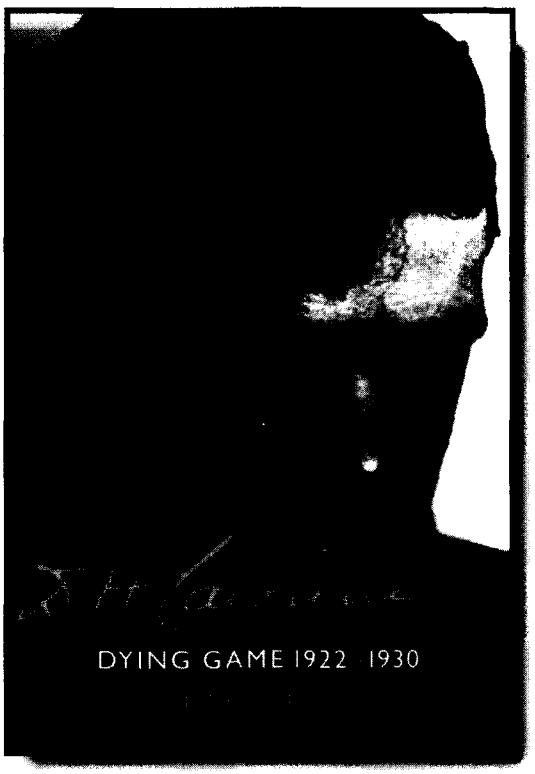

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The Art City Our Fathers Built

ALFRED KAZIN

A city is a place where a small boy, as he walks through it, may see something that will tell him what he wants to do with his life.

—Louis Kahn

I was once that small boy. From my earliest encounters with its art—art that was to liberate my senses and drive me to become a writer after all the poverty this city of the greatest wealth had inflicted on my frightened immigrant parents—New York possessed for this native son, in the words of Scott Fitzgerald from Minnesota, "all the iridescence of the beginning of the world."

I first walked into the Metropolitan Museum seventy-one years ago, as a boy of eleven, led by my father, an immigrant house painter from darkest Brooklyn who liked his firstborn to accompany him as he timidly looked into the city's public places—the Met, the Brooklyn Museum, the great library on Fifth Avenue, the Aquarium on the Battery, the Staten Island ferry when it charged a nickel. In those days one entered the museum from the park. The entrance hall was packed with monumental marble sculptures. I perched myself in one of them, fingering the fragile program of the music that David Mannes's orchestra was playing that night on the balcony. I was staggered by the volume of space around me, the royal look of the great staircase, the plenitude of European splendor. The museum was intoxicatingly full of proud masterpieces I would not see on their home grounds until the war got my generation to London, Paris, and Rome. The appeal all of this made to my senses was utterly

Alfred Kazin, Emeritus Distinguished Professor of English at City University of New York, is the author, most recently, of *God and the American Writer*. This essay was based on a talk given at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.

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unexpected. And the most astonishing thing was that this first revelation of Europe in all its wonder was taking place in my own city, New York.

When Henry James, a native New Yorker, returned from decades in England to gather impressions for his haughty but irresistible book *The American Scene*, his observations were set against the New York he had known as a boy. He tried to be ironic about the wealth that had built the museum. But he was impressed by the ability of the robber barons to buy art casually and then to give it to the public with an air of benevolence. He wrote:

> It is a palace of art, truly, that sits there on the edge of the Park, rearing itself with a radiance, yet offering you expanses to tread; but I found it invited me to a matter of much more interest than any mere judging of its dispositions. . . . Education, clearly, was about to seat herself in these marble halls—admirably prepared for her, to all appearance—and issue her instructions without regard to cost. . . . There was money in the air, ever so much money—that was, grossly expressed, the sense of the whole intimation. And the money was to be *all* for the most exquisite things—for all the most exquisite except creation . . . ; for art, selection, criticism, for knowledge, piety, taste. . . . The thought of the acres of canvas and the tons of marble to be turned out into the cold world . . . ought to have drawn tears from the eyes. But . . . the Museum, in short, was going to be great.

Once our school made an excursion to the Met. That morning they walked us across the park to the museum, and after entering through the back door I was flung spinning in a bewilderment of delight from the Greek discus throwers to the Egyptian mummies to the rows of knights in armor to the breasts of Venus.

That bewilderment was soon replaced by much-needed information about my own, my native land. We were led up a flight of white steps to a long, narrow room lined with grandfather clocks and portraits of prosperous Puritan merchants and rosy-faced divines in clerical neckbands, who looked down at me snootily. Nothing for me there. But in the very back of the museum, in an alcove near the freight elevator, hung so low and lit so dimly that I had to crouch to take them in, were paintings of New York during the period after the Civil War—skaters on the frozen lake in Central Park, red mufflers flying in the wind; a gay crowd moving round and round Union Square Park; horsecars charging between the brownstones of lower Fifth Avenue at dusk.

I had not yet read Whitman and Hart Crane, the poets who most loved New York, and I could only blink in awe at the beauty of the towers of the Brooklyn Bridge as the trolley rumbled across, carrying my father and me to lower Manhattan, where he met nostalgically with his fellow

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immigrants from Minsk every Saturday night. But here in the museum I could not believe my eyes. Room upon room contained not only Rembrandt and Goya but my city, my country—Winslow Homer's dark oblong of Union soldiers making camp in the rain, tenting tonight, tenting on the old campground, as I had never thought I would see them when we sang that song in school; Thomas Eakins's solitary sculler on the Schuylkill, resting to have his portrait painted in the yellow light, with bright patches of a raw Pennsylvania spring showing on the riverbank; and, most touching to me then, John Sloan's painting of a woman standing in the stern of a New York ferryboat—painted just about the year my parents met.

I regularly left my home across the East River in Brooklyn to throw myself on the city for my education. Every Sunday, I walked from my home in Brownsville straight up Eastern Parkway to the Brooklyn Museum and the Botanic Garden. I did not yet know that Brooklyn's great tree-lined promenades, Eastern Parkway and Ocean Parkway, had been conceived by Frederick Law Olmsted, the visionary in urban landscape who had created Central Park. Nor did I know that he considered his masterpiece to be Brooklyn's Prospect Park, where he had more room to turn the gritty long wasteland into lakes and rambles and proliferating greenery.

I loved walking Eastern Parkway when it was still fresh. Each tree along the path held a plaque commemorating an American soldier fallen in the Great War. To come upon the Brooklyn Museum was a shock, it tried so hard to look grand. Ancient and classical figures with great gaps between them confronted Eastern Parkway from a ledge below the cornice. Unlike the Met, the museum seemed emptily monumental, too big for its actual holdings. But it was there that I discovered the dusky frail little sea paintings of Albert Pinkham Ryder. Ryder had fled his native New Bedford to paint in New York. Even in the commercial city, his dream life as a painter of the sea startlingly resembled that of Melville, the New Yorker who had embarked from New Bedford for the great whaling voyage that led to *Moby-Dick.*

The Brooklyn Museum also contained the watercolors that John Singer Sargent had brought back from the West Indies. Scintillating as these were, nothing reached me so deeply as the Ryders. Like Eakins and Homer, Ryder was one of those isolate American originals in the closing decades of the nineteenth century who was not so much an influence on the moderns to come as an example of great individual vision and stubborn integrity in the face of neglect. It took Marsden Hartley, that wonderful painter from Maine who was first recognized by Alfred Stieglitz in this country after being admired in Germany, to describe the joy he felt on first seeing a Ryder seascape: "It had in it everything that I knew and

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had experienced about my own New England . . . [and] bore such a force of nature itself as to leave me breathless." I must confess that my own approach to Ryder was more literary. I was fascinated by everything lonely and deep in the old American imagination—Thoreau, Melville, Emily Dickinson. Ryder was of their company.

After I discovered Ryder in the Brooklyn Museum, everything I learned of him I owed to Lewis Mumford. Of all the father figures who guided New York's taste from the twenties on, Mumford was my favorite. He was the American Ruskin, a furious social idealist who linked all the arts. *The Brown Decades*, Mumford's study of the arts in America from 1865 to 1895, recreated not only Ryder but also the other major characters of those prodigious thirty years during which the rough materials of the new industrial world found talents who knew just what to do with them. Louis Sullivan modernized Chicago, Charles Peirce conceived pragmatism, Josiah Gibbs laid out new paths in physical science, Thomas Eakins revealed (to his cost) what a brave artist could make of the unclothed body, male and female alike. The German immigrant John August Roebling invented wire rope, making possible suspension bridges, the greatest of which—Brooklyn Bridge—was one of the first works of modern engineering to display itself as a work of art. As Mumford put it:

> The stone plays against the steel: the granite mass in compression, the spidery steel in tension. In this structure, the architecture of the past, massive and protective, meets the architecture of the future, light, aerial, open to sunlight, an architecture of voids rather than solids.

With what grace and loving insight did Mumford pay homage to these original talents!

New York was my connection to everything new and wondrous in the arts. New York was *it*, precisely because it absorbed the foreign as its own, just as the great towers of Brooklyn Bridge reflected the cathedral doors of John Roebling's native town of Mühlhausen, in Germany. The critic Paul Rosenfeld had the perfect title for the book he wrote in the twenties on modern American painters: *Port of New York*. Through the port came the Stieglitz family, whose most famous representative liked to boast, "I am American born, I live in Hoboken." Through the port, at one time or another, because of one war or another, came Marcel Duchamp, Willem de Kooning, Arshile Gorky, Piet Mondrian, André Kertész, André Breton, Max Ernst, Saul Steinberg, Marc Chagall, Mark Rothko, George Grosz, Hans Hofmann, Raphael and Moses Soyer, Meyer Schapiro, Max Weber, Abraham Walkowitz; the fathers of Jacob Epstein, Barnett Newman, Adolph Gottlieb, Franz Kline, Clement Greenberg, Leonard Baskin; the forebears of Helen Frankenthaler.

Hitler was to provoke an emigration of European artists to New York

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that has been called the largest major artistic migration since the fall of Constantinople. World city, imperial city, city of so many million transplantings seeking the tree of liberty so repeatedly cut down elsewhere! As Yehudi Menuhin said during the Second World War, one of the great war aims was just to get to New York. If the English Revolution was achieved in America, one of the hopes of the French Revolution was realized in New York's art world—careers open to talent, open even to those who just loved art as part of the Creation. How moving it is just to list some of the artists who fled Hitler for America and, without necessarily settling in New York, helped to make 57th Street, during and after the war, the international art center no single European city had ever been: Salvador Dalí, Fernand Léger, Yves Tanguy, Josef Albers, Jacques Lipchitz, John Hartfield, Wassily Kandinsky, Oskar Kokoschka, Kurt Schwitters, André Masson, Matta Echaurren, Walter Gropius, Marcel Breuer, Lyonel Feininger, László Moholy-Nagy, Max Beckmann, Mies van der Rohe. When Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century gallery opened in October 1942, the design by the Viennese refugee Frederick Kiesler—featuring turquoise floors and paintings suspended from sawed-off baseball bats—provoked the stunned critic for the *New York Sun* to write, "Frankly, my eyes never bulged further from their sockets." When it came to the art world, Delmore Schwartz had it exactly right: "Europe is still the biggest thing in North America."

For American artists in the first half of the century, New York itself was the great new subject. New York painters seemed to love the city more than New York writers did; the painters were tuned in to the passing show, where Stephen Crane, Theodore Dreiser, and later embittered left-wing realists like Michael Gold saw only victims and oppressors. I had no positive city images until I discovered them in art museums. At the old Whitney on Eighth Street, I found Reginald Marsh's paintings of Fourteenth Street shoppers; at the Met, I found John Sloan's neighborly Greenwich Village backyards with prowling cats and laundry drying on the line, and his full-figured secretaries in red hats just released from the office and rollicking under the curve that the Sixth Avenue El made at Thirtieth Street.

There was a certain haste to the painters whom the officially approved artists at the National Academy of Design derogatively called the Ashcan School. This reflected the timely discovery of New York as a subject. Many of the Ashcan paintings were humanly generous but broad in conception, too easy to take. George Bellows's 1924 painting of Dempsey knocking Firpo out of the ring was as pleasant in its way as the Raphael Soyer paintings of meltingly lovable girls sitting around an employment agency. New York realists were more at home with sweating muscles than with the puzzle of existence. But I was glad that Henri, Glackens, Bellows, Luks, and Sloan were around—they gave color, the vibrant smack of life,

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to a New York that needed the recognition through art that writers and painters both withheld until the new century burst upon them.

The exception to these too-easily-understood painters of New York scenes was Edward Hopper. Hopper was a man apart. He painted himself in the lonely figures who stared at—never through—the window glass in paintings like *Nighthawks* and *New York Office.* Their indecipherable faces were secondary to the sense of place that imprisoned them. There was no essential difference in Hopper's style or interest from 1924, when he was "recognized," to his death in the late 1960s. He had no interest in "ideas," that bane of performance artists who have unhappily never heard of Wittgenstein's suggestion: "Don't think, *look!*" What absorbed Hopper was certain recurring images—a single figure in a bare room, restaurant, or theater; the shock of Cape Cod light on white shingle boards; bridges and roofs without any figure in the picture to recall the invisible observer who brooded over the thickness and hardness of the building materials.

Early Sunday Morning, which Hopper painted in 1930, has haunted me as no other New York painting ever has. Hopper brought to the silent street—the barber pole, the fire hydrant, the uneven line of window shades, the awnings over the shop fronts—the intensity of his own perception. Every time I come back to it, *Early Sunday Morning* seems larger than I remembered it. Since nothing is so typical of New York as the certain disappearance of something we once loved, the doggedness of Hopper's attachment had to be painted large. Why does that row of low brick houses on lower Seventh Avenue rivet me? It is because the street has entered into Hopper's consciousness in a way that transcends realism. He has made the drab and the commonplace beautiful through the force of belonging. Every detail in the street belongs to us and we to it.

In its artistic beginnings and its social idealism, the unfolding of the century's early years in New York was sweet. "The fiddles are tuning as it were all over America," said the painter John Butler Yeats in 1912. He had settled in New York, explaining that Ireland had become too small to hold him and his son the poet. In John Sloan's painting of a convivial group at the Petitpas' boardinghouse on Twenty-ninth Street, you can see the bearded Yeats benevolently sitting alongside Van Wyck Brooks and Sloan himself. Painters and writers in those days were part of the same revolution.

In Greenwich Village, John Reed, Mabel Dodge, Randolph Bourne, and Van Wyck Brooks were thinking revolution, At 291 Fifth Avenue, Alfred Stieglitz was showing Matisse, Cézanne, and Picasso—sometimes even before they were shown in Paris. New names were coming to the fore—Stuart Davis and Arthur B. Davies, Marsden Hartley and Georgia O'Keeffe, John Marin and Arthur Dove—many of them linked to

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Stieglitz, who was not only a genius as a photographer and our first great original in the field, but also a genius as a promoter of American artists.

I met Stieglitz for the first time in 1943 at An American Place, the gallery at Madison and 52nd that he had founded in 1929 after his first two galleries had closed. Although he was near eighty, complained of a weak heart, and had put away his camera because, as he said, "the excitement would kill me," he perked up when he took in the very striking girl I had brought along. "You're a beauty," he grumbled at her from his couch at the back of the gallery. He was vividly the angry old man I had so often read about, irritable in the extreme. In his cracked voice, he railed against the Metropolitan Museum, a place he liked to call the enemy of modern art. Did he know that after his death, his widow, Georgia O'Keeffe, would donate some of his finest works to the Met?

I had become a slave to Stieglitz's eye the moment the writer Gerald Sykes gave me an early print of *The Steerage,* now in the permanent collection of the International Center of Photography in New York. *The Steerage* shows a boatload of immigrants standing on the upper and lower decks of a liner in mid-ocean. I did not know then that the figures in the photograph were on their way *back* to Europe, probably rejected at Ellis Island. Stieglitz, coming on the scene as he left his first-class cabin, had rushed back for his camera—and when he returned, the figures had not moved.

I imagined my mother as the woman who stands on a lower level draped in a towel, facing away. My mother seemed to be frozen forever on that lower deck. The marvel of the composition is how Stieglitz positions the whole scene around the little white bridge with drooping rails that leads the steerage passengers not out of the steerage but only from one level of it to another. What this great artist can do once he seizes the organizing center around which the passengers stand idly brooding! They are free to go from one level to another, but they are not free of the ship's funnel that hangs over their heads. And all this is seen in a flash from first class, where Stieglitz is looking *down* in every sense. No division of classes, no picture. Yet every structure belonging to the ship itself creates the levels on which the passengers are draped. Stieglitz's approach is entirely aesthetic.

Dorothy Norman was Stieglitz's disciple and biographer, a gifted photographer herself, but so modest in deference to the master that her own beautiful photographs were constricted, almost tiny. She handsomely published a journal called *Twice a Year* (although it came out whenever Dorothy thought of it) and in one issue included reproductions of Stieglitz's most famous photographs. I have been living with them for over half a century. Stieglitz's photographs of old New York possessed my soul. His was the New York through which my mother and father had stumbled to meet as lonely young immigrants.

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Stieglitz's genius for composition brought out the beauty of muddy, dirty, snow-encrusted New York at the turn of the century with the special feeling for ensemble that made history in *The Steerage.* In *The Terminal,* a horsecar at the end of the route is being turned around for the trip back. The driver wears a black coat and a large official pumpkin of a hat, white with snow all around the brim. He stands with his back to us as he unbuckles the horse leading his team. The snow and the horses' breath steam up like a layer of white air into the center of the picture. The horsecar has HARLEM written in big letters up front. There are more fresh horses off on one side, blanketed against the cold. On the other side, some gent in a derby is walking through snow past a shop with a sign above the awning, the end of which reads "& Bats." End of the line. The curve of the horsecar on its tracks, the curve in the team of horses tamely standing in the white powdery winter air! This is the winter city in miniature. Stieglitz has not missed a thing. And neither will we, once we grasp the full beauty of his intention.

All this was before the New York art scene was shaken up by the 1913 show at the 69th Regiment Armory, where Marcel Duchamp's nude descended the staircase in cubes. "Before it, a painting truly modern was a rumor," the theater designer Lee Simonson wrote later in the *Seven Arts.* Thanks to its main organizer, the painter Arthur B. Davies, the Armory Show presented for the first time a comprehensive collection of innovative European work. "International Exhibition of Modern Art" was the official title. Some thirteen hundred exhibits were included, two-thirds of which were American, but it was the European artists who brought the big crowds and aroused so much controversy that when the show reached Chicago, art students wanted to hang Matisse and Brancusi in effigy. The Post-Impressionists alone were represented by eighteen van Goghs, fourteen Cézannes, and thirteen Gauguins. The Fauves, with Matisse at their head, had more than forty pictures. In the first three showings alone, some three hundred thousand visitors paid to enter the Armory.

The Armory Show established a respect for the modern that has survived the many cheap and ridiculous things since done in its name. Royal Cortissoz, for decades the standpat critic of the *New York Tribune* and then the *Herald-Tribune,* growled against "Ellis Island art." But the great Europeans at the Armory Show never saw America, and Duchamp, for all the outrage caused by *Nude Descending a Staircase,* was interested not so much in the work of art as in the idea behind it. His early overriding ambition, says Calvin Tomkins in his amusing account of the art revolution Duchamp fostered, was "to invent a new means of expression that had nothing to do with Cubist theories of what he called 'retinal' art—art whose appeal was mainly or exclusively to the eye rather than to the mind." The art world was soon too rich in ideas, though few were as

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arrestingly impudent and brilliant as Duchamp's, whose great passion was not art but chess, with its endless strategies for knocking out your opponent.

Two years after the Armory Show, Duchamp rolled into New York to find himself already famous. He had said to Walter Pach of the famous Pach photography family, "I do not go to New York, I leave Paris." But New York soon became his favorite city, the place, Tomkins reports, where he felt more at home than anywhere else. Duchamp was delighted with America because he thought it a one-class country, called Greenwich Village a real Bohemia full of people doing absolutely nothing, and considered New York itself "a complete . . . work of art." The city ignored the cultural past and was therefore "a perfect terrain for new developments."

While subsisting on the two dollars an hour he got for French lessons, Duchamp made the West Sixty-seventh Street duplex owned by the collector Walter Arensberg and his wife Louise the site of the most brilliant circle in New York. In those heady days early in the new century, when it wasn't just fun to talk of turning the world upside down but positively a social duty, Duchamp promoted art as a mental act. "It was always the idea that came first, not the visual example," he said.

This was Duchamp's real but insidious contribution to the ever more fashionable art scene, for nothing is so easy for an artist to obtain as an idea that calls on the viewer to complete it when it takes form. And even when it doesn't. William Blake said that "the eye sees more than the heart knows." Art for Duchamp was not the historic struggle of the painter to learn all that his eye has seen but that is still buried in his consciousness. It was a thought, a whim, a prank, when, in 1917, he submitted a urinal under the title *Fountain*, and signed "R. MUTT," to an exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists, and announced that common manufactured items, "readymades," were works of art by virtue of having been chosen and signed.

After he met Duchamp and his circle, William Carlos Williams wrote admiringly, "There had been a break somewhere, we were streaming through, each thinking his own thoughts, driving his own designs toward his self's objectives." Yet Williams's central directive to poets was "no ideas but in things." He was to hate T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* because it was such a reactionary *concept* of the modern world, without faith, gone to hell. How to reconcile Williams's belief in things over ideas? Everything before the war was challenging if it was really new.

The modern was eventually sanctified when it was institutionalized in 1929 as the Museum of Modern Art. Lincoln Kirstein, who was long a member of its Advisory Committee and a friend of its founding director, Alfred Barr, broke with the museum in a 1946 article called "The

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State of Modern Painting." Kirstein complained of "the general acceptance and canonization of abstract painting—a modern Abstract Academy that, like its academic predecessors, now wins prizes in eminently respectable salons." He was in no sense opposed to "the use of unhampered imagination, experiment in new method or material, or what is loosely called distortion." But he was opposed to "improvisation as method, deformation as a formula, and painting (which is a serious matter) as an amusement manipulated by interior decorators and high-pressure salesmen." The useful catalogues put out by the Museum had done their job almost too well. "Today," wrote Kirstein, "young painters feel that the past fifty years or more are more instructive and worthy of imitation than the past five hundred years."

At his death in 1996, it was remembered of Kirstein that he thought modern art was drifting toward a dangerous, self-canceling solipsism. The art world was certainly getting jammed with theoreticians—many of whom resembled critics who found it easier to interpret art than to paint it. Joan Acocella reminded us that Kirstein wanted to restore to painting "the great tradition stretching from Giotto to the nineteenth century."

The pleasure I get from contemporary art is not an illusion. But on the margins of inspiration, a lot of it has become just publicity seeking: putting plates on the canvas instead of the table; painting with one's own hair instead of a brush; publicly bathing in streams of foam; "performing" a work of art instead of creating one; and, in general, as the art critic Harold Rosenberg declaimed of something called Action Painting when that was the latest, aiming "to fuck up the canvas." Big deal!

Still, Nietzsche said it all: "We have Art so that we may not perish of the truth." Art makes up for a lot in life. It is the great redeemer, the transformer, the recurrent magic whose secrets are never fully known even to those who create it. When art begins in pleasure and gives us pleasure, as it has for me in New York City, we come close to loving the world as we never did before.

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The Afterlife: Remembering Matches

In memoriam, James Laughlin (1914–1997)

HAYDEN CARRUTH

Once when I was an old poet and was visiting
An even older poet, he dropped a box
Of matches that scattered every whichway
At our feet, and although he asked me not to,
I stooped to help him retrieve them and restore them
Neatly to their box, the red ends pointing
All in the same direction. What a delight—
One of those little moments of gratification
That St. Augustine says are the only value
In life and the presages of a divine presence.
My friend was a great man, and so in a far
Less significant way was I, and I helped him
Return his scattered matches to their little box.

Hayden Carruth, Professor Emeritus of English at Syracuse University, is the author of many books of poetry and the winner of the National Book Award for Poetry in 1996 for *Scrambled Eggs and Whiskey*.

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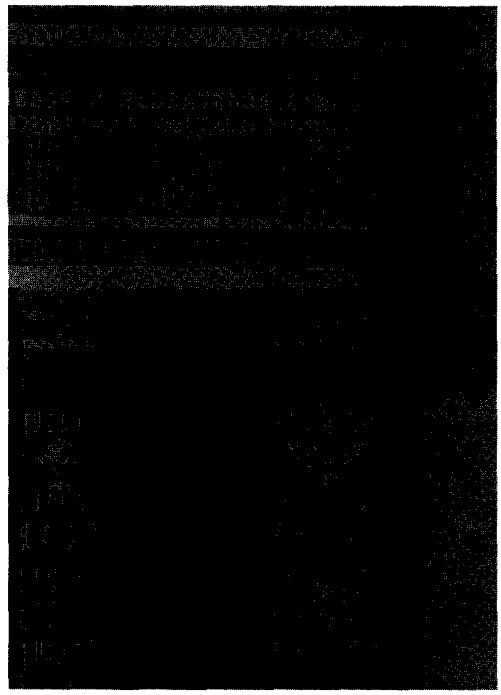

The Flatiron Building (8/18/96)
with the Double Suns

This is the Flatiron Building from the view of the 30th floor of the building across. I put a long, thin cloud and the lighter salmon sky, instead of other buildings and streets. If you look through the windows, you can see the double suns. Also the window panes make the sky a little pinker, but it is still lighter below the cloud if you look through. The double suns is a mirage, which is caused by the cloud. Two of the top windows have the shades half way down, and one of them has the shade down a bit. Lower part of the big windows have the venetian blinds a part way down. On one of the three windows has the blind down open and two have the blind down closed. On the left of the big windows is the woman's face, and on the right is the man's face. Above right from the male face, you can see a little sculpture like thing. Notice you can still see a bit of pink sky at the bottom of the picture.

Jessy Park

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Exiting Nirvana

CLARA CLAIBORNE PARK

We are at the island post office. It's midsummer, and the parking lot is full. I will park at the curb and rush inside while my daughter stays in the car.

She doesn't like that. "We could ask someone to move so we can park," she says.

"We can't do that," I tell her.

She confirms this. "We can't ask them because they were there first."

She was just hoping; she really does know the rule. She learned it years ago, when she asked some people to move from her favorite table and had to leave the restaurant. Now I countersink the lesson: "How would you feel if someone asked us to move so they could park?"

"Hurt my *feelings*."

Still, evidently, more work to be done. "No, it wouldn't hurt your feelings. Feelings get hurt when somebody does something or says something and you think they don't like you. Or criticize you." (This is getting complicated.) "It's not when they do something *you* don't like; then you get *irritated,* or *angry.* That's different."

My daughter is thirty-nine.

The middle of the journey. The middle of *her* journey; nearer the end of mine. But I had better begin nearer the beginning, where I began thirty-three years ago, when I first realized there was a story to tell.

Clara Claiborne Park, who teaches at Williams College, is the author of *Rejoining the Common Reader* and *The Siege: The First Eight Years of an Autistic Child.* Her most recent article in the SCHOLAR was "The River and the Road" (Winter 1997).

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We start with an image—a tiny, golden child on hands and knees, circling round and round a spot on the floor in mysterious, self-absorbed delight. She does not look up, though she is smiling and laughing; she does not call our attention to the mysterious object of her pleasure. She does not see us at all. She and the spot are all there is, and though she is eighteen months old, an age for touching, tasting, pointing, pushing, exploring, she is doing none of these things. She does not walk, or crawl up stairs, or pull herself to her feet to reach for objects. She doesn't want *any objects. Instead, she circles her spot. Or she sits, a long chain in her hand, snaking it up and down, up and down, watching it coil and uncoil, for twenty minutes, half an hour, longer . . .*

It was like that; that was when we began to know.

To know what? Today, any reasonably savvy pediatrician would know what, would recognize autism when she saw it in as pure a form as this. Autism is when your two-year-old looks straight through you to the wall behind—through you, her father, her sister, her brother, or anybody else. You are a pane of glass. Or you are her own personal extension, your hand a tool she uses to get the cookie she will not reach for herself. Autism is when your eight-year-old fills a carton with three-quarter-inch squares of cut-up paper to sift between her fingers for twenty minutes, half an hour, longer, autism is when your eleven-year-old fills sheet after sheet with division, division by three, by seven, eleven, thirteen, seventeen, nineteen. . . . But that's enough, there are many books about autism now, anyone can read the symptoms. I need the image for what the symptoms don't convey: this child was *happy*. Is it not happiness to want nothing but what you have? Craving, the Buddha taught, was the source of all misery, detachment the road to the serene equilibrium of nirvana.

But nirvana at eighteen months? That's too soon.

Yet I must start with that happiness, if only because, in those bad years, it was so thoroughly denied. Only in a few psychoanalytic backwaters is it still believed what, thanks to the journalistic skills of Bruno Bettelheim, was then believed so widely: that the autistic child, like the so-called zombies of the concentration camps, was withdrawing from unbearable agony. "Autistic children . . . fear constantly for their lives," he wrote. Also: "The precipitating factor in infantile autism is the parent's wish that his child should not exist." His? The sentence comes from a section headed "The Mother in Infantile Autism." I could quote more, but I won't bother. It is painful to return to the book that Bettelheim, with his gift for metaphor, called *The Empty Fortress*, and, thank God and the rules of evidence, it has become unnecessary. Autism is now almost universally recognized as a developmental disorder, multiply caused: genetic predisposition, pre- or post-natal viral infection (I had measles when I was six months pregnant), chromosomal damage, biological agents still un-

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known. Magnetic resonance imaging shows brain anomalies. So do autopsies. The research goes on. Every bit of it, however little it can as yet contribute to our own child's habilitation—unlike Bettelheim, we do not speak of cure—buries deeper the injustice of Bettelheim's terrible accusation.

For Jessy was happy. Her happiness was not occasional or accidental, it was characteristic of her condition, as characteristic, as needful of acknowledgment, as the eerie banshee shrieks and wails that the books call tantruming, which no parent of a normal toddler would confuse with the familiar noise of a child who is not getting what she wants. Jessy's tantruming was not anger or frustration; it was desolation, a desolation as private and enveloping as her happiness.

What precipitated it? The causes were as inexplicable as the causes of her delight. Perhaps her milk was served in a glass instead of a cup, or offered after the meal instead of before. Perhaps she couldn't find a particular square—she knew exactly which one she was looking for—among those thousands of bits of paper. Perhaps some of the six washcloths in the family bathroom were missing—three, or two; she knew how many, though she had no words for numbers. Speechless, she gave no clue. Even when she began to put words together, years later, we were no nearer understanding. It was, we could be sure, never anything that would make another child shriek. It was always trivial, or what normal people would call trivial—trivial in everything but its effect on Jessy. How long would the sounds continue? Ten minutes (if we could guess the cause and rectify it), half an hour, one hour, two?

By the time she was twelve or thirteen she *could* tell us. But what good did it do to know that a lighted window had disrupted the darkness of the building across the street, that a cloud had covered the moon, that she had accidentally caught sight of Sirius? Consider Jessy at thirty-three, able by then, albeit with fractured syntax, to explain why ten years earlier she screamed and screamed when she saw the word *water:* it was "fluffy in the middle." (That's the kind of thing I write down, Jessy-notes I've taken for the past thirty-seven years. Believe me, I couldn't make it up.) "At least two small letters on each side, but even. With one tall letter. Bothered me to see it for about two weeks and then went away and bothered me to hear it for I *think* about a semester and then went away." Why did it bother her? "Combination of fluffy in the middle and liquid and part of the car. In the radiator. Only bad if a combination of three. That called the forbidden combination." All clear now?

But it was not such distress that defined her. The desolation came, it passed, it was *over,* its transitoriness as mysterious as its intensity. The next day it could become a subject of cheerful conversation—the next day, or ten years later. "No *wonder* I cried," she'll say, her voice alive with her characteristic rising, positive, happy intonation.

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She is happy still. I can't think of another woman of thirty-nine who is more content with who she is, less likely to question how she lives or what she does. Though she no longer circles a spot or snakes a chain up and down, she still has her sources of strange, private pleasure. Things once bad may even become good, as has happened with fluffy-in-the-middle words. Last year she was delighted to find *nuclear* and *nucleus,* to add to a list including *radio, valve, molar,* and *unwelcome.*

It is, however, far more important that over the years such mysterious pleasures—and pains—have been joined by others more "normal," more recognizable to other human beings, more *connected* to other human beings, as she has learned, slowly and imperfectly, to function not only beside them but with them, in a shared world. That is her achievement, made possible (like all the achievements of profoundly handicapped people) by the work and support of many others—young people who lived with us and became wise and resourceful therapists; patient teachers; accepting, helpful people in her workplace and her community. And always, first and last, her father and me, with whom she still lives. That is what these thirty-nine years have been about.

They have not been about a miraculous recovery, though selective narration could give that illusion. They have not been about happiness, either; in very real ways they have been about its opposite. They have been about growth, and there is no growth in nirvana. The world we share, the only world we had to offer that wordless baby, is our common world of risk, frustration, loss, and unfulfilled desire, as well as of activity and love. We would not leave Jessy to her empty serenity. We would not, as was often recommended in those days, institutionalize her "for the sake of the other children," to spend her days rocking somewhere in a back room. We would keep her with us; we would entice, intrude, enter where we were not wanted or needed.

It was like assaulting a walled city. I called the book I wrote about it *The Siege,* choosing the title two years before I'd ever heard of an empty fortress. The metaphor is that compelling. Four years, five years, six years—we did get into the walled city. But of course when Jessy began to look at us, to recognize us, to need us, even, in her way, to love us, this was no goal achieved but only a beginning. The siege metaphor became transmuted into a more ordinary one. Siege into journey.

When Jessy was small, there were no real explanations for the condition the psychiatrist Leo Kanner had identified in 1943 and called Early Infantile Autism. He had observed and described those eerily detached children; he had thought that such a profound inability to relate to others was probably "innate." But Kanner had also speculated in a different direction. The phrase "refrigerator parents" was his. Twenty-five years later, before the newly formed National Society for

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Autistic Children (now the Autism Society of America), he would repudiate this explanation in words none of us who heard him would ever forget: "Herewith I acquit you people as parents." But though Kanner called *The Empty Fortress* "the empty book," the ghost of parental responsibility was not so easily laid to rest. Nor was there yet research to offer convincing support for alternative hypotheses.

In the thirty years since then, evidence has accumulated for more merciful—and realistic—conceptualizations. Suppose a very young brain has an impairment in what we now call information processing. A new baby is flooded with information—with what William James called a "buzzing, blooming confusion" of light, shadow, color, sound. And if this baby's brain is not ready to do what other babies do so naturally that we don't even think about it—to resolve the confusion of sense impressions into faces and voices that experience can render familiar and welcome? What then? Suppose she cannot do what other babies do instinctively, understand the changing expressions on those faces, the tones of those voices? Might she not prefer the security of a world she *could* make sense of, a world that didn't change, or changed predictably—a world not of faces, not of voices, certainly not of words, but of spots on the floor and snaking chains? Of clear, unchanging, identifiable shapes and colors? And when that secure order was disrupted, might she not be desolate?

Supplement this with another conceptualization. When Clifford Geertz summarizes "the critical features of human thinking," his list is not what we might expect: sequencing of events, perception of cause and effect, induction and deduction. What he mentions is far more fundamental: "joint attention with others to objects and actions, attribution of beliefs, desires, and emotions to others, grasping the general significance of situations." Shall we call this, with Uta Frith, who studies the development of autistic children, a "theory of mind"? It seems too grand a phrase to describe what little tiny average babies, as soon as they are born, get busy developing. Yet these are the skills, this is the natural human knowledge without which the social world, that interwoven tissue of meanings into which every baby is plunged, is unintelligible.

These conceptualizations were not available when Jessy circled her spot. Now we see how well they explain the challenges she, and we, lived with. For overwhelmingly, these challenges were social. As she grew, we were to discover how little trouble she had with sequencing, cause and effect, induction and deduction. But "joint attention"? It is such a simple thing. A mother and a baby look at a picture book together. The mother points; soon the baby will too. Or they play clap-hands or peekaboo; mother and baby laugh. Yet learning cannot take place without these "critical features of human thinking." We learn by imitation; imitation is a social act. It does not occur in nirvana, where there is neither need nor opportunity for joint attention.

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By the time Jessy was six, she could put two or three words together. She heard, even understood a little of what we said to her. How could we teach her to understand more, to speak more intelligibly? More, how could we motivate her to do the simple activities it became clear she was capable of doing? She could count, even subtract; the washcloth anxiety proved that. She could notice the slightest deviation from a pattern. Clearly she could set the table. But why should she? To imitate her sisters? To please her mother? Such natural, social motivators are meaningless without "attribution of beliefs, emotions, and desires to others," without a "theory of mind."

At two and a half she had drawn a closed circle, an *X*, even, astonishingly, a *J*. *Once*; six months later she wouldn't even pick up a crayon. Why should she? Why should anybody do anything? She could distinguish the most subtle shades of color; she did not utter her first adjectives until six, but when they came they were not the commonplace "bad" or "nice," laden with social value. Rather (of two Volkswagens side by side) she chirped, cheerfully, positively, correctly, "peacock-BLUE car, peacock-GREEN car!" Yet later, after I had lured her back into drawing, she would take the first crayon available. Yellow on white? Why not? She drew for her own purposes, not to be visible to others. Sometimes she even cut up what she had drawn and added the pieces to the other three-quarter-inch squares in her sifting carton.

Colors were easy. Numbers, even arithmetical processes, were easy. They were there in her head already, waiting for names. The year she turned nine, we sat together as I filled row after row, sheet after sheet, with renditions of valentine heart candies, things she knew and liked. They could be counted, grouped in twos . . . threes . . . fives . . . nines, which could themselves be grouped: three groups of nine heart candies clearly made twenty-seven. Or I drew circles and divided them into halves, thirds, fourths, fifths—fractions! Or I added pentagons and hexagons to the triangles and squares she'd recognized before she was three. With her still rudimentary speech she asked for the series to continue: "Seven sides? Eight sides?" Heptagon, octagon, dodecagon—she learned *those* words as soon as I spoke them.

We could share attention when I entered her world, an abstract world of order and repetition—the things that represented intelligibility and security amid the bewilderment of talk she could not understand, body language she could not read, social clues she could not interpret. Two years later she would spend hour upon hour in solitary, not to say compulsive, multiplying and dividing. We watched her cover sheet after sheet with divisions by 7, 11, 13, 17, 19, identifying primes and prime factors, but it was our friend Freeman Dyson who saw that a series of four-digit numbers she repeated on sheet after sheet was in fact the squares of the numbers from 51 to 100, arranged according to the number of powers of

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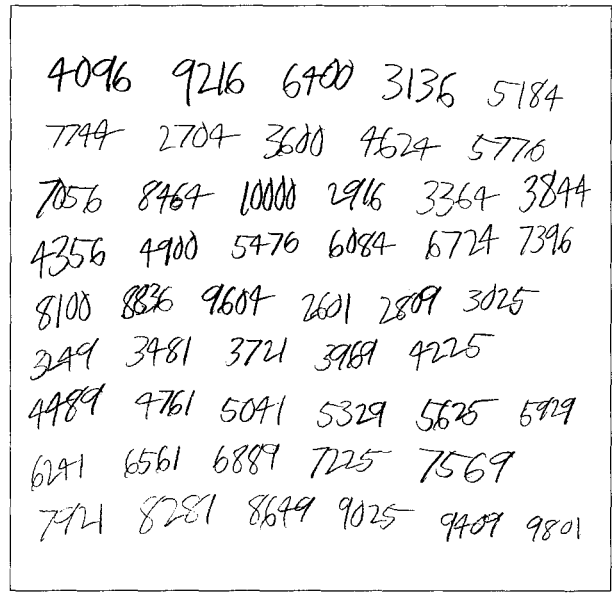
two they contain. 4096 is 64^2 or 2^{12}; it is made of nothing but 2's. 9216 is 96^2; 96 is 3 x 32, 32 is 2^5, and so on. The odd numbers, beginning with 2601, which is the square of 51, complete the list. She was happy in a world of numbers.

Jessy has not lost her capacity for autistic delight. What makes her happy today? Once she'd exult over her discovery that "70003 is a *prime!*" Then numbers became what she calls "too good," so good that she would speak them only in whispers, or refuse to say them at all. Then her interest subsided; other things evoked her secret smile. Stars. Rainbows. Clouds. Weather phenomena. Quartz heaters. Odometers. Street lamps. A strange procession of obsessions, eliciting for a year or two an intensity of emotion approaching ecstasy, then subsiding into mere pleasure. Wordless once, now she could be thrilled by a word, a phrase. "Asteroid explosion." "Digital fluorescent number change." Recently it's anything to do with banks, checks, above all *fees*. "There's a fee in feeling! And feet!" We know that special smile, that faraway gaze. But don't, don't ask her "Why are you smiling?" The phrase itself (and there are others) invites desolation, the banshee wail. We don't know why. Was she once punished for daydreaming? Does she resent the invasion of her secret world? She won't say. Could she if she would?



Squares of the numbers from 51 to 100, calculated by Jessy Park at age 11

What in psychiatry would be termed an obsession becomes in art the exploration of a theme. We encourage her to paint these sources of delight. They make her painting not a task but a pleasure, and infuse it with the surreality of her secret world. Though people buy her paintings, there is one she hasn't wanted to sell. It's up in her room, a rendition, in lovely pastels, of the two best things in all of New York City, which marvelously come together in the World Financial Center: the Merrill Lynch bull and the logo of Godiva chocolates. Though her own script is that of an unusually neat third grader, the elegant lettering is perfectly repro-

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duced, with an unerring hand and eye. Godiva, Merrill Lynch. The very words make her smile.

In paintings we encourage her obsessions, but in daily life we must limit them. Fascinated at first, people can enjoy just so much conversation about fees, and they may actively object if Jessy scrutinizes their bank statements. We have made sacrifices for the precious ordinariness of habilitation. Would Jessy's mathematical obsession, properly nurtured, have made her into a computer whiz? I doubt it. Her calculations led nowhere; she was interested in doing them, repeating them, contemplating them, not in using them. Her math is now limited to her bankbook and her tax forms, her division of the weekly grocery bill, her unerring memory for the box numbers of students who graduated ten years ago. Numbers, once so absorbing, have gone to join her spot. So have the "little imitation people" ("Lilliputian" must have sounded like that to her, long ago) who once used to people the appliances, a family in each. Or have they? I ask her today: are the little imitation people still around, perhaps in the office computer? She says they are, but she won't talk about them as she used to. Still, she's smiling her secret smile.

Everybody likes to be astonished. Astonishing abilities and strange preoccupations have become part of the lore of autism, though most autistic people do not have them. "Savant skills," they're called today, our kindly vocabulary of sensitivity having jettisoned the old phrase "idiot savant." But "savant" has a hollow ring to the parents of a child to whom algebraic processes make more sense than the social interactions of Dick, Jane, and Sally. The challenges of daily life are less interesting to read about and much more important.

Jessy had to learn, if she could, to listen, to speak, to understand, even to read and write, that being part of daily life in the twentieth century. In time she did, as she learned to feed herself, to dress herself, to use the toilet, to make her bed, to perform useful tasks about the house. I do not write "make herself useful": to do that you have to perceive the desires and emotions of others, and she did not achieve enough joint attention to call that skill into being. But concrete skills were not difficult to acquire once she learned to imitate. The much maligned techniques of behavior modification (rewards and, more rarely, penalties; happiness, alas, is not the point) eventually provided her adequate motivation. Characteristically, the reinforcers were not food or praise but numbers, a rising tally on a golf counter. Every new skill made life easier for us and richer for her, as her repertoire of activities expanded.

But the most important skills are social. Jessy's social understanding remained, and remains, radically incomplete. Such simple lessons. "We can't ask them to move because they were there first." The difference between irritation and hurt feelings. Making sense of people. "Grasping

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the general significance of situations." These are the things the autistic adult, like the autistic child, finds the hardest.

What is it like to have to learn the myriad rules of human interaction one by one, by rote? By rote, because the criterion of "how would I feel if" is unavailable, since so much of what pleases (or distresses) her does not please others, and so little of what pleases (or distresses) others pleases her. Jessy cannot tell us. Temple Grandin is an assistant professor of animal science at Colorado State University, and she can. She has told Oliver Sacks that being autistic is like being an anthropologist on Mars. Autism, like other biological conditions, comes in varying degrees of severity. Temple's journey has taken her further than Jessy's ever will. In the course of it she has learned the necessity of learning to live like the natives. The natives, too, if they live with such a person, or work beside her, have a lot to learn.

What's it like? It can be funny; that's the best of it. Five years ago Jessy gave me an unexpected Mother's Day gift—a can of cat litter deodorizer, beautifully wrapped, topped with a tiny restaurant packet of strawberry jam. The attribution of feelings and desires to others still has a way to go.

Other things are funnier to hear about than to experience. As when, at work, Jessy, thirty-seven years old, went to the rest room and came back to find the chair she'd vacated occupied by a co-worker. Without a word she plumped herself down in the young woman's lap. "She criticized me," Jessy told me when she came home crying. I can imagine she did. Happiness is not the point. Jessy has a job and this was not acceptable workplace behavior. Another lesson. One by one.

She understands the principle now; she can even generalize it. Of the *Star Wars* trilogy (the kind of simple story she is now able, with help, to follow), she remarked: "But it turned out that Darth Vader turn out to be a good guy. I guess he learned from consequences. Like me!" That exclamation point is a pale means for conveying the characteristic tone of her assertions: cheerful satisfaction with herself and with what she has perceived. The verb inflections aren't perfect. I know by now they never will be. But Jessy is communicating, and gladly, her simple social learning. That is enough.

Slowly it grows. Recently she astonished me with a social generalization so huge I could hardly believe it. "This is how life goes on," she said. *Life?* Ten years ago she couldn't have said, couldn't have *thought,* anything like that. But as she continued, the philosophical abstraction slid back into the concreteness from which it rose: "People *do* move from one house to another!"

A description of autism must be anecdotal, for without such anedotes—a few among (literally) thousands, for I still keep notes—there are words but not experience. Anecdotes must temper our yen for

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the miraculous, keep the account honest. Without them, Jessy's slow progress takes on too much of the aura of the success story everybody wants to hear. Suppose I say what is entirely true: that she has worked, rapidly and efficiently, for sixteen years in the Williams College mailroom; that she is hardly ever absent and never late; that she pays taxes; that she keeps her bank account accurately to the penny; that she has saved more money than any of her siblings; that increasingly she keeps house for her aging parents; that I haven't touched a vacuum cleaner in years; that she does the laundry, the ironing, some of the cooking, all of the baking; that she is a contributing member of her community and of her family. Who wouldn't hear, behind those words, others: *miracle, recovery, cure?* And I have as yet hardly mentioned the brilliant acrylics that seem to be, but are not, the crown of her achievements.

Indeed, they are remarkable. Black-and-white can convey the ordered exactitude of the outlines, the clarity and repetition of design elements (she doesn't do people, though she can: "too hard"), recalling the baby to whom shapes and colors were more significant than faces. There is no vagueness in her paintings, no dashing brush strokes, no atmospheric washes. It's hard-edge stuff, and always has been. Even in nursery school she never overlapped her colors, never scrubbed them together into lovely, messy mud. Her paintings then were as characteristic as these today, repetitive arrangements of shapes and patterns, always controlled, always in balance.

What black-and-white can't convey is the incandescence of her colors, and even the finest reproduction could not convey their variety. There's a rainbow in the boarding of a barn, set off, below the drainpipe that appears in so many of her paintings, against a deep, pure red. The small, high window is (Jessy now tells me) "purplish ultramarine." Virgo and Libra appear in the "purplish black" sky. The sky behind the Flatiron Building is "two different shades of salmon," because "cloud disrupt the blending of stratification." ("Stratification" is one of her special words; she says it smiling.) Showing through the windows, that sky (with "double suns") is "just pink but not salmon, because window made it pinker." One mask is "pale mint," the other neither salmon nor pink but "*pale* pink." The eagle is pale yellow. And there's lavender, and pale blue, and lime (which isn't mint) and peach (which isn't salmon), and the full spectrum in the sheaves and medallions, and that's not all.

Jessy paints; paintings bring checks; the numbers in her bank account rise, as once the numbers rose (and occasionally fell) when she kept track of her behaviors on a golf counter. The checks are a significant motivator for her, as the growing recognition is for us, who must answer inquiries and learn to negotiate the world of galleries and shows—social complexities forever beyond Jessy's ken. But for us, and for her, what's

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important about this demanding, absorbing activity, valued and rewarded by society, is not what it brings to her bank account or her reputation (a concept much harder to understand than stratification), but what it brings to her life. It interests people, predisposes them in her favor, encourages them to overlook behavior that needs overlooking. Autistic people need that. Yet its real meaning for her life is more ordinary: it gives her something to do.

Something to do when she's not working in the mailroom, or changing the cat's pan, or mending her clothes, or changing her sheets, or attending aerobics (a scheduled, predictable, repetitive, satisfying, autistic activity), or taking out the trash, or, as they say, whatever. But there isn't any whatever for Jessy. Her skills, however they have been expanded by years of teaching, do not and cannot embrace the huge range of normality; she doesn't know what to do with leisure. With nothing to do, she won't go for a walk or call a friend. She reverts to the old, stereotyped behaviors. She still likes to rock.

So it is that her real achievements are in the realm of the practical, the necessary, the unromanticizable (for it is all too easy to romanticize autism)—the things that make her employable in the community and useful and welcome at home. How important it was that as a baby, however indifferent she was to others, she be attractive to them: clean, nicely dressed, no runny nose, no disgusting habits. We worked hard on that. Today she is still attractive, though not as lovely as that golden baby. Not that she ever looks in a mirror; she has no interest in how she appears to others, even to herself. The only interesting thing about clothes is their colors. Her closet presents the full spectrum of pastels, from which, the night before, she will lay out the lavender shirt and slacks, or the mint, or the lime—the night before, because if she feels hurried in the morning, if she sleeps a single minute past seven, she will be intensely, irrationally distressed at the deviation from this one of the many routines that structure and maintain her world.

Routine, autism's curse and gift. Routines may be varied—for years we've had "flexibility practice." It's possible, with some negotiation, to skip the Sunday vacuuming or the Tuesday trash pickup. Still, Jessy is at ease only when what's to be done is done, the order of things complete. Hence her distress when she forgets something, if only for a moment; hence her intolerance of the slightest error, her desolation, yes, desolation, when she types a period for a comma. It is little consolation that a typo can be fixed with a strikeover, a "painto" with quick-drying Wite-Out. Relaxation techniques have helped. Though paintos still disturb her, it's been years since she banshee-wailed over one. Today the wails are more likely to be over something that has happened at work—a criticism, a reprimand, something that could be called, and is, a social interaction. Yet even then there may be autism at the root. A co-worker helps Jessy

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finish distributing a mailing, but that assistance disrupts the proper order of numbered mailboxes. She doesn't shriek at work; that, she knows, is "forbidden." She tries to relax, to control the intensity of her distress. She even succeeds. It is on her way home that even from inside the house I can hear her crying.

Routine, curse and blessing. For routine also maintains the behaviors that make her an efficient mail clerk, and the daughter I couldn't do without. Once there was no motivation to help at home, then there were points on a golf counter, now there is routine. Does she enjoy these tasks? The question is meaningless. She does them because she does them, because she is radically uncomfortable if they are left undone. It's obsessive, compulsive. We don't mind the vocabulary and neither does she. "I obsessed!" Her compulsiveness can be difficult for those around her, since now that she is more conscious of other people she wants them, too, to be error-free and on time. But routine gets the work done, makes life livable.

Nor is routine incompatible with creativity. Routine maintains the growing beauty of her paintings. Once a commission is received and a painting begun, it must be completed, perfectly, to the last minuscule detail. Is that all there is to it? Is painting also something she does just because it's there to be done? Here, too, the years have been about growth, not just growth in technique, but growth in what for want of a better word I must call sociality. When her work was first exhibited, years ago, in a little local gallery, she was interested only in the refreshments. She is still interested in the refreshments, but now she also enjoys the praise. When people come to the house, she says, "Do you want to see my paintings?" In 1993 a tiny reproduction of one of them was chosen to represent Massachusetts on the White House Christmas tree. When we showed her the story in the paper, she exclaimed, "So it's the first time the president to hear from *me!*" Let this be the measure of her entry into the world we share.

The point, of course, is not to make her a willing drudge, at home, at work, or with her tubes and brushes. The point, now as always, is to maintain and expand the range of activity that makes her what we never thought she could be: a busy, useful member of household and community. And after we are gone? She'll be somewhere in her forties, probably, her siblings in their fifties, when her future becomes their responsibility. Whether she stays in her own home with a companion or moves to a group home or a sheltered village or lives with a brother or sister, her active usefulness will make the road smoother, both for her and for those around her.

It is not only because she is useful, however, that I can write these words with a faith in a future I will not see. Usefulness is a great achievement—her own, and that of all those who have accompanied her on the

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difficult road to activity and self-control. But it is not for her usefulness that people love her, with a love that is that future's best guarantee. And they do, though it isn't always easy. They love her for her otherworldliness, her simplicity, her utter incapacity for manipulation or malice. They love her for her childlike purity.

Childlike. I have held off from using that word, although it must have occurred more than once to anyone reading my careful transcriptions of things that Jessy has said. For all the talk of "discovering the child within you," it is thought condescending, lacking in respect, to compare a mentally handicapped adult to a child. But those who live with Jessy know that the truest respect lies not in the wishful insistence that she is really just like other people, but in the recognition, and the valuing, of what she is.

I will close with a story of something that just happened, an event that told me more than I knew about where Jessy is today. It is not a happy story, but it is a good one. It comes in two parts.

I lost count long ago of all the young people who have loved Jessy and helped her grow, and about whom this account has said too little, but among them there is no one who helped her more, and loved her better, than Marilyn. Mal lives in Oakland now, working with the deaf; we like to think Jessy contributed to that. In 1991 there was a fire in Oakland. We pointed out the pictures to Jessy when the TV news came on, making sure she knew Mal was safe. The next day, when she asked "Should I cry if I found out Mal is dead?" we were startled rather than surprised. Jessy, who must try so hard to control her crying, often asks, "Is it a good reason to cry?"

And this spring: a new acronym makes her happy. She likes acronyms, repeatable, manageable formalisms that help her gain a hold upon the uncertainties of the world. TBA: she knows that from the college calendar—To Be Arranged. Jessy wants to know when things are going to happen, gets anxious when they don't occur as scheduled. She has been planning to go visit her friend Scooch, one of the dearest of the long succession of those who've lived in our house and helped. Scooch didn't forget Jessy when he graduated from Williams. As his own career carried him into the art world, he made her career his project. He commissioned a painting of his grandfather's house. He took her to sketch it, but it was raining and she couldn't. He was going to take her again. But he was busy and troubled, more troubled than we knew. The spring wore on. Jessy doesn't like to wait, but she can handle it with TBA; TBA makes her smile.

Then comes the telephone call I can still hardly believe. Scooch is dead.

Should we tell Jessy? We decide we must. She'll have to know some-

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time. She doesn't say anything, but goes to her room. I don't know why I don't follow her. I guess my own emotions are too raw. I can't bear to hear what I fear she might say. The next day she tells me she "cried silently"; that's how she is supposed to cry at work, if she must cry, and certainly I didn't hear her. She asks some questions about what she's calling "the death." They are factual, neutral; they are at least endurable. She doesn't want to go with us to the funeral, and we don't press her.

We'll have a memorial gathering, it's decided, just his closest friends, here at the island he loved. We'll plant a flowering bush. Jessy will be with us. They all know about her. So she won't get bored or impatient, I tell her what's going to happen: we'll dig the hole, plant the bush, and stand around it and remember Scooch. Anybody who wants to can say something.

I consider for a moment feeding her something appropriate to say, but decide against it. The rest of us speak what we feel, then are silent.

Minutes pass. *And then Jessy begins to speak.* I paraphrase; it was not a time for note-taking. Quietly, factually, she tells the things Scooch did for her, that he organized her first one-man show, that he got her a commission to paint the National Arts Club on Gramercy Park, that he took her to New Jersey to sketch his grandpa's beautiful house but she couldn't because it was raining and even the photographs weren't good, that they were going to go back but it was TBA. In her tone was neither the cheerfulness none of us could have borne, nor autistic desolation, but quiet sadness. Happiness is not the point. Jessy knows, I think, in her own concrete way, that her friend did those things for her because he loved her. He loved her innocence, her pure transparency; he saw it in her paintings. He loved the fact that words like *innocence* mean nothing to her, that transparency to her is only a property of glass. He loved her, he did things that made her happy, she won't see him again, and that is a good reason to cry.

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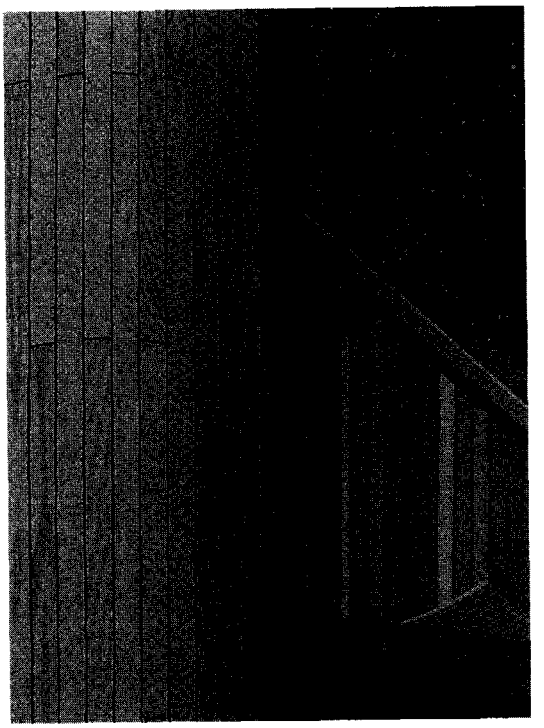

The Smith's Caretaker Barn
and the Silo (12/23/95)

This is the back of the barn and the silo. The sky is purplish black. There are Virgo, Libra, Corona Borealis, Serpens Caput, Centaurus, Corvus Crater, Coma Berenices, a part of Bootes, a part of Scorpius, and a part of Hydra. There are some wood grains on the silo. The window is black, because the inside of the barn is dark. This picture is around summer solstice.

Jessy Park

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Maple Valley Branch Library, 1967

RITA DOVE

For a fifteen-year-old there was plenty
to do: browse the magazines,
slip into the Adult section to see
what vast *tristesse* was born of rush-hour traffic,
décolletés, and the plague of too much money.
There was so much to discover—how to
lay out a road, the language of flowers,
and the place of women in the tribe of Moost.
There were equations elegant as a French twist,
fractal geometry's unwinding maple leaf;

I could follow, step-by-step, the slow disclosure
of a pineapple Jell-O mold—or take
the path of Harold's purple crayon through
the bedroom window and onto a lavender
spill of stars. Oh, I could walk any aisle
and smell wisdom, put a hand out to touch
the rough curve of bound leather,
the harsh parchment of dreams.

As for the improbable librarian
with her salt and paprika upsweep,
her British accent and sweater clip
(mom of a kid I knew from school)—
I'd go up to her desk and ask for help
on bareback rodeo or binary codes,
phonics, Gestalt theory,
lead poisoning in the Late Roman Empire;
the play of light in Dutch Renaissance painting;
I would claim to be researching
pre-Columbian pottery or Chinese foot-binding,
but all I wanted to know was:

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Tell me what you've read that keeps
that half smile afloat
above the collar of your impeccable blouse.

So I read *Gone with the Wind* because
it was big, and haiku because they were small.
I studied history for its rhapsody of dates,
lingered over Cubist art for the way
it showed all sides of a guitar at once.
All the time in the world was there, and sometimes
all the world on a single page.
As much as I could hold
on my plastic card's imprint I took,

greedily: six books, six volumes of bliss,
the stuff we humans are made of:
words and sighs and silence,
ink and whips, Brahma and cosine,
corsets and poetry and blood sugar levels—
I carried it home, five blocks of aluminum siding
and past the old garage where, on its boarded-up doors,
someone had scrawled:

I CAN EAT AN ELEPHANT
IF I TAKE SMALL BITES.

Yes, I said, to no one in particular: *That's*
what I'm gonna do!

Rita Dove, Commonwealth Professor of English at the University of Virginia, won the 1987 Pulitzer Prize in poetry for *Thomas and Beulah*. From 1993 to 1995 she served as Poet Laureate of the United States. Her latest poetry book is *Mother Love*, and her verse drama, *The Darker Face of the Earth*, originally produced by the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in 1996, was presented last fall at the Kennedy Center.

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Now, Now

PAUL MULDOON

I

A sentence of death, my love, as if we were destined to squint
into the glint
of a firing party, going down on one knee
the better to see
their hearts a-flutter with swatches of lint.

II

Seeing, instead, a pig's back all tinges and tints
merely by dint
of its having been handed down, under an apple-heavy tree,
a sentence of death.

III

For we hold in our heart of hearts, as the frizzens strike their flints,
what we hitherto took as a hint—
that the rider whom we so eagerly
awaited will leap from the saddle now, now to proclaim the decree
that life is indeed no more than "a misprint
in the sentence of death."

Paul Muldoon, the Howard G. B. Clark Professor in the Humanities at Princeton, is the author of *The Prince of the Quotidian* and *The Annals of Chile*. He won the 1996 Award in Literature from the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

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The Talmud and the Internet

JONATHAN ROSEN

Turn it and turn it for everything is in it.
—Babylonian Talmud

Not long after my grandmother died, my computer crashed and I lost the journal I had kept of her dying. I'd made diskette copies of everything else on my computer—many drafts of a novel, scores of reviews and essays, and hundreds of articles—but I had not printed out, backed up, or copied the diary. No doubt this had to do with my ambivalence about writing and where it leads, for I was recording not only my feelings but also the concrete details of her death. How the tiny monitor taped to her index finger made it glow pink. How mist from the oxygen collar whispered through her hair. How her skin grew swollen *and* wrinkled, like the skin of a baked apple, and yet remained astonishingly soft to the touch. Her favorite songs—"Embraceable You" and "Our Love Is Here to Stay"—that she could no longer hear but that we sang to her anyway. The great gaps in her breathing. The moment when she was gone and the nurses came and bound her jaws together with white bandages.

I was ashamed of my need to translate into words the physical intimacy of her death, so while I was writing it, I took comfort in the fact that my journal did and did not exist. It lived in limbo, much as my grandmother had as she lay unconscious. My unacknowledged journal became, to my mind, what the Rabbis in the Talmud call a *goses:* a body between life and death, neither of heaven nor of earth. But then my computer crashed and I wanted my words back. I mourned my journal alongside my grandmother. That secondary cyber loss brought back the first bodily

Jonathan Rosen is the culture editor of the *Forward*. His novel, *Eve's Apple*, will be published in paperback in May by Plume.

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loss and made it final. The details of her dying no longer lived in a safe interim computer sleep. My words were gone.

Or were they? Friends who knew about such things assured me that in the world of computers, nothing is ever really gone. If I cared enough about retrieving my journal, there were places I could send my ruined machine where the indelible imprint of my diary, along with everything else I had written, could be skimmed off the hard drive and saved. It would cost a fortune, but I could do it.

The idea that nothing is ever lost is something one hears a great deal when people speak of computers. "Anything you do with digital technology," my Internet handbook warns, "will leave automatically documented evidence for other people or computer systems to find." There is, of course, something ominous in that notion. But there is a sort of ancient comfort in it, too.

"All mankind is of one Author and is one volume," wrote John Donne in one of his most beautiful meditations. "When one man dies, one chapter is not torn out of the book, but translated into a better language; and every chapter must be so translated." I'd thought of that passage when my grandmother died and had tried to find it in my old college edition of Donne, but I couldn't, so I'd settled for the harsher comforts of Psalm 121—more appropriate for my grandmother in any case. Donne's passage, when I finally found it (about which more later) turned out to be as hauntingly beautiful as I had hoped. It continues:

> God employs several translators; some pieces are translated by age, some by sickness, some by war, some by justice; but God's hand is in every translation, and his hand shall bind up all our scattered leaves again, for that Library where every book shall lie open to one another.

At the time I had only a dimly remembered impression of Donne's words, and I decided that as soon as I had the chance, I would find the passage on the Internet. I hadn't yet used the Internet much beyond e-mail, but I had somehow gathered that universities were all assembling vast computer-text libraries and that anyone with a modem could scan their contents. Though I had often expressed cynicism about the Internet, I secretly dreamed it would turn out to be a virtual analogue to John Donne's heaven.

There was another passage I wished to find—not on the Internet but in the Talmud, which, like the Internet, I also regard as a kind of terrestrial version of Donne's divine library, a place where everything exists, if only one knows how and where to look. I'd thought repeatedly about the Talmudic passage I alluded to earlier, the one that speaks of the *goses*, the soul that is neither dead nor alive. I suppose the decision to remove my

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grandmother from the respirator—despite her "living will" and the hopelessness of her situation—disturbed me, and I tried to recall the conversation the Rabbis had about the ways one can and cannot allow a person headed toward death to die.

The Talmud tells a story about a great Rabbi who is dying. He has become a *goses,* but he cannot die because outside his hut all his students are praying for him to live, and this is distracting to his soul. A woman climbs to the roof of the Rabbi's hut and hurls a clay vessel to the ground. The sound diverts the students, who stop praying. In that moment, the Rabbi dies and his soul goes to heaven. The woman, too, says the Talmud, will be guaranteed her place in the world to come.

This story, suggesting the virtue of letting the dead depart, was comforting to me, even though I know that the Talmud is ultimately inconclusive on end-of-life issues, offering, as it always does, a number of arguments and counter-arguments, stories and counter-stories. Not to mention that the Talmud was codified in the year 500 A.D., long before certain technological innovations complicated questions of life and death. Was I retelling the story in a way that offered me comfort but distorted the original intent? I am far from being an accomplished Talmud student and did not trust my skills or memory. But for all that, I took enormous consolation in recalling that the Rabbis had in fact discussed the matter.

"Turn it and turn it for everything is in it," a Talmudic sage (who never said anything else the Talmud deemed worth recording) famously declared. The phrase, a sort of verbal Ouroboros, describes the Talmud and appears in the Talmud, a tail-swallowing observation that seems to bear out the truth of the sage's comment. The Talmud is a book and is not a book, and the Rabbi's phrase flexibly found its way into it because, oral and written both, the Talmud reached out and drew into itself the world around it, even as it declared itself the unchanging word of God.

Though it may seem sacrilegious to say so, I can't help feeling that in certain respects the Internet has a lot in common with the Talmud. The Rabbis referred to the Talmud as a *yam,* a sea—and though one is hardly intended to "surf" the Talmud, there is something more than oceanic metaphors that links the two verbal universes. Vastness, a protean structure, and an uncategorizable nature are in part what define them both. When Maimonides, the great medieval commentator, wanted to simplify the organization of the Talmud and reduce its peculiar blend of stories, folklore, legalistic arguments, anthropological asides, biblical exegesis, and intergenerational Rabbinic wrangling into simplified categories and legal conclusions, he was denounced as a heretic for disrupting the very chaos that, in some sense, had come to represent a divine fecundity.

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Eventually, Maimonides was forgiven, and his work, the Mishnah Torah, is now one of the many sources cross-referenced on a printed page of Talmud. It has been absorbed by the very thing it sought to replace.

The Mishnah itself—the legalistic core of the Talmud—is divided into six broad Orders that reflect six vast categories of Jewish life, but those six categories are subdivided into numerous sub-categories called tractates that range over a far more vast number of subjects that are often impossible to fathom from the name of the Order in which they appear. The Hebrew word for tractate is *masechet*, which means, literally, webbing. As with the World Wide Web, only the metaphor of the loom, ancient and inclusive, captures the reach and the randomness, the infinite interconnectedness of words.

I have often thought, contemplating a page of Talmud, that it bears a certain uncanny resemblance to a home page on the Internet, where nothing is whole in itself but where icons and text-boxes are doorways through which visitors pass into an infinity of cross-referenced texts and conversations. Consider a page of Talmud. There are a few lines of Mishnah, the conversation the Rabbis conducted (for some five hundred years before writing it down) about a broad range of legalistic questions stemming from the Bible but ranging into a host of other matters as well. Underneath those few lines begins the Gemarah, the conversation *later* Rabbis had about the conversation *earlier* Rabbis had in the Mishnah. Both the Mishnah and the Gemarah evolved orally over so many hundreds of years that even in a few lines of text, Rabbis who lived generations apart give the appearance, both within those discrete passages as well as by juxtaposition on the page, of speaking directly to each other. The text includes not only legal disputes but fabulous stories, snippets of history and anthropology, and biblical interpretations. Running in a slender strip down the inside of the page is the commentary of Rashi, the medieval exegete, on the Mishnah, the Gemarah, and the biblical passages (also indexed elsewhere on the page) that inspired the original conversation. Underneath Rashi, and rising up on the other side of the Mishnah and the Gemarah, are the tosefists, Rashi's descendants and disciples, who comment on Rashi's work, as well as on everything Rashi commented on himself. The page is also cross-referenced to other passages of the Talmud, to various medieval codes of Jewish law (that of Maimonides, for example), and to the Shulkhan Arukh, the great sixteenth-century codification of Jewish law by Joseph Caro. And one should add to this mix the student himself, who participates in a conversation that began about fifteen hundred years ago.

Now all this is a far cry from the assault of recipes, news briefs, weather bulletins, library catalogues, pornographic pictures, Rembrandt reproductions, and assorted self-promotional verbiage that drifts untethered through cyberspace. The Talmud was produced by the moral

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imperative of Jewish law, the free play of great minds, the pressures of exile, the self-conscious need to keep a civilization together, and the driving desire to identify and follow the unfolding word of God. Nobody was trying to buy an airline ticket or meet a date. Moreover, the Talmud, after hundreds of years as an oral construct, was at last written down, shaped by (largely) unknown editors, masters of erudition and invention who float through its precincts offering anonymous, ghostly promptings—posing questions, proposing answers, offering refutations. One feels, for all the Talmud's multiplicities, an organizing intelligence at work.

And yet when I look at a page of Talmud and see all those texts tucked intimately and intrusively onto the same page, like immigrant children sharing a single bed, I do think of the interrupting, jumbled culture of the Internet. For hundreds of years, *responsa*, questions on virtually every aspect of Jewish life, winged back and forth between scattered Jews and various centers of Talmudic learning. The Internet is also a world of unbounded curiosity, of argument and information, where anyone with a modem can wander out of the wilderness for a while, ask a question, and receive an answer. I find solace in thinking that a modern technological medium echoes an ancient one.

For me, I suppose, the Internet makes actual a certain disjointed approach that I had already come to understand was part of the way I encounter both books and the world. I realized this forcefully when I went looking for the John Donne passage that comforted me after the death of my grandmother. I'd failed to find it in my Modern Library edition of Donne's *Complete Poetry and Selected Prose.* I knew the lines, I confess, not from a college course but from the movie version of *Eighty-Four, Charing Cross Road,* starring Anthony Hopkins and Anne Bancroft. The book, a 1970 best-seller, is a collection of letters exchanged over twenty years by an American woman and a British book clerk who sells her old leather-bound editions of Hazlitt and Lamb and Donne, presumably bought up cheap from the libraries of great houses whose owners are going broke after the war. I suppose the book itself is a comment on the death of a certain kind of print culture. The American woman loves literature, but she also writes for television, and at one point she buys Walter Savage Landor's *Imaginary Conversations* so she can adapt it for the radio.

In any event, I checked out *Eighty-Four, Charing Cross Road* from the library, hoping to find the Donne passage, but it wasn't in the book. It's alluded to in the play that was adapted from the book (I found that too), but it isn't quoted. There's just a brief discussion of Donne's Sermon XV (of which the American woman complains she's been sent an abridged version; she likes her Donne sermons whole). So I rented the movie again, and there was the passage, read beautifully in voice-over by Anthony

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Hopkins, but without attribution, so there was no way to look it up. Unfortunately, the passage was also abridged, so when I finally turned to the Web, I found myself searching for the line "All mankind is of one volume" instead of "All mankind is of one Author and is one volume."

My Internet search was initially no more successful than my library search. I had thought that summoning books from the vasty deep was a matter of a few keystrokes, but when I visited the Web site of the Yale Library, I discovered that most of its books do not yet exist as computer text. I'd somehow believed the whole world had grown digital, and though I'd long feared and even derided this notion, I now found how disappointed and frustrated I was that it hadn't happened. As a last-ditch effort, I searched the phrase "God employs many translators." And there it was! The passage I wanted finally came to me, as it turns out, not from the collection of a scholarly library but simply because someone who loves John Donne had posted it on his home page. (At the bottom of the passage was the charming sentence "This small thread has been spun by . . . " followed by the man's name and Internet address.) For one moment, there in dimensionless, chilly cyberspace, I felt close to my grandmother, close to John Donne, and close to some stranger who, as it happens, designs software for a living.

The lines I sought were from Meditation XVII in "Devotions upon Emergent Occasions," which happens to be the most famous thing Donne ever wrote, containing, as it does, the line "never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee." My search had led me from a movie to a book to a play to a computer and back to a book. (The passage was, after all, in my Modern Library edition, but who could have guessed that it followed from "No man is an island"?) I had gone through all this to retrieve something that an educated person thirty years ago could probably have quoted by heart. Then again, these words may be as famous as they are only because Hemingway lifted them for his book title. Literature has been in a plundered, fragmented state for a long time.

Still, if the books had all been converted into computer text, and if Donne and Hemingway and *Eighty-Four, Charing Cross Road* had come up together and bumped into each other on my screen, I wouldn't have minded. Perhaps there is a spirit in books that lets them live beyond their actual bound bodies.

This is not to say that I do not fear the loss of the book as object, as body. Donne imagined people who die becoming like books, but what happens when books die? Are they reborn in some new ethereal form? Is it out of the ruined body of the book that the Internet is growing? This would account for another similarity I feel between the Internet and the Talmud, for the Talmud was also born partly out of loss.

The Talmud offered a virtual home for an uprooted culture, and it

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grew out of the Jews' need to pack civilization into words and wander out into the world. The Talmud became essential for Jewish survival once the Temple—God's pre-Talmud home—was destroyed, and the Temple practices, those bodily rituals of blood and fire and physical atonement, could no longer be performed. When the Jewish people lost their home (the land of Israel) and God lost his (the Temple), then a new way of being was devised, and Jews became the people of the book and not the people of the Temple or the land. They became the people of the book because they had no place else to live. That bodily loss is frequently overlooked, but for me it lies at the heart of the Talmud, for all its plenitude. The Internet, which we are continually told binds us all together, nevertheless engenders in me a similar sense of Diaspora, a feeling of being everywhere and nowhere. Where else but in the middle of Diaspora do you *need* a home page?

The Talmud tells a story that captures this mysterious transformation from one kind of culture to another. It is the story of Yochanan ben Zakkai, the great sage of the first century, who found himself living in besieged Jerusalem on the eve of its destruction by Rome. Yochanan ben Zakkai understood that Jerusalem and the Temple were doomed, so he decided to appeal to the Romans for permission to found a yeshiva outside Jerusalem. In order to get him out of Jerusalem without being killed by the Zealots—the Jewish revolutionaries—Yochanan's students hid him in a coffin and carried him outside the city walls. They did this not to fool the Romans but to fool the Zealots, who were killing anyone who wasn't prepared to die with the city.

Yochanan wasn't prepared to die with the city. Once outside its walls, he went to see the Roman general Vespasian and requested permission to set up a yeshiva in Yavneh. Vespasian consented, and it is thus in Yavneh that the study of the oral law flourished, in Yavneh that the Mishnah took shape, and in Yavneh that Talmudic culture was saved while Temple culture died. In a sense, Yochanan's journey in his coffin is the symbolic enactment of the transformation Judaism underwent when it changed from a religion of embodiment to a religion of the mind and of the book. Jews died as a people of the body, of the land, of the Temple service of fire and blood, and then, in one of the greatest acts of translation in human history, they were reborn as the people of the book.

I think about Yochanan ben Zakkai in his coffin when I think about how we are passing, books and people both, through the doors of the computer age, and entering a new sort of global Diaspora in which we are everywhere—except home. But I suppose that writing, in any form, always has about it a ghostliness, an unsatisfactory, disembodied aspect, and it would be unfair to blame computers or the Internet for enhancing what has always been disappointing about words. Does anyone really want to be a book in John Donne's heaven?

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A few weeks after my computer crashed, I gave in and sent it to a fancy place in Virginia, where—for more money than the original cost of the machine—technicians were in fact able to lift from the hard drive the ghostly impression of everything I had written on my computer during seven years of use. It was all sent to me on separate diskettes and on a single inclusive CD-ROM. I immediately found the diskette that contained my journal and, using my wife's computer, set about printing it out.

As it turns out, I'd written in my journal only six or seven times in the course of my grandmother's two-month illness. Somehow I'd imagined myself chronicling the whole ordeal in the minutest recoverable detail. Instead, I was astonished at how paltry, how sparse my entries really were. Where were the long hours holding her hand? The one-way conversations—what *had* I said? The slow, dreamlike afternoons with the rest of my family, eating and talking in the waiting area? Where, most of all, was my grandmother? I was glad to have my journal back, of course, and I'd have paid to retrieve it again in a second. But it was only when I had my own scant words before me at last that I realized how much I'd lost.

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The Subtextual Reincarnation of Voltaire and Rousseau

ROBERT WOKLER

Editors are notoriously the humblest underlaborers among scholars, their lives' work—discreetly camouflaged in prefaces, footnotes, and appendices—more often consulted than read, and virtually ignored by the general public. Editors of correspondence, in scavenging mainly among documents unintended for publication, seem doubly removed from the world of original scholarship, their transcriptions commanding interest, if at all, mainly because of the light they shed on the deeper writings or broader careers of their authors. Working subtextually, in small print, they are obliged to serve their subject with tactful reserve, to be unobtrusive, inconspicuous, anonymous.

Theodore Besterman and Ralph Leigh, the most recent and most comprehensive of all the editors of the correspondence of Voltaire and Rousseau, respectively, exhibited none of these traits. In assembling and annotating the letters of two of the greatest eighteenth-century philosophers, they also attempted to explain their subjects' motives, complete their thoughts, and dispose of their detractors. Each editor believed that he had such uniquely privileged access to the mind

Robert Wokler, Reader in the History of Political Thought at the University of Manchester and currently a fellow of the Collegium Budapest, is the author of *Rousseau*, in the Oxford University Press "Past Masters" series, and co-editor of the forthcoming *Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought*. This essay was presented, in a somewhat different form, at a British Academy colloquium on "Biography and the Creative Artist" in 1997. Some passages have been adapted from essays by Wokler published in *Voltaire et ses Combats* and in *Rousseau and the Eighteenth Century*; and from an obituary of Ralph Leigh in the *Proceedings of the British Academy*.

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of his favorite author as to be able to impart fresh life to the material he glossed and, by both disposition and design, to become the personification—indeed, the reincarnation—of the object of his scrutiny. In their own letters to one another, as well as through the footnotes and commentaries of their editions, they also contrived, as conspicuously as possible over a period of almost twenty-five years, to transport one of the greatest quarrels of the Enlightenment to the world of modern scholarship.

Born in Poland in 1904, Theodore Besterman passed his childhood in London, and, apart from a brief period at a private school in the city's northern suburbs, he received little formal tuition, educating himself largely in the library of the British Museum. He never held a university appointment nor gained any university degrees until late in life, when he received honorary doctorates from Oxford and Geneva.

Besterman asserts that he purchased his first set of the works of Voltaire at the age of ten, thereby initiating a childhood attachment that was to last throughout his life. In the biography of Voltaire he published in 1969, he cast himself proudly among Voltaire's disciples, albeit not one who worshipped his hero blindly, since his devotion always remained, as he put it, "this side [of] idolatry." Few readers can have failed to notice how easily his fascination passed over to the other side. He not only shared Voltaire's commitments to cosmopolitan ideals and to unmasking hypocrisy when it was presented as science; he not only emulated the gusto and pungency of Voltaire's sarcastic wit so as to lend greater vitality to humanitarian principles. As the guiding spirit and director of the Institut et musée Voltaire in Geneva—lodged at Les Délices, the property Voltaire had purchased in 1755—Besterman also, as he often remarked himself, lived in Voltaire's house, slept in Voltaire's bed, and perused Voltaire's mail as if it had been addressed to him.

Endlessly fascinated by the relationship between Voltaire and his niece, Marie-Louise (that is, Mme Denis), Besterman took as his third wife, in the final and most Voltairean phase of his own life, a woman who was also named Marie-Louise, to whom he dedicated his biography of Voltaire. In assuming his hero's character and attributes as his own, he progressively transfigured himself into the object of his enchantment. "For twenty years I have passed all my days in his company," he reflected after becoming the master of Voltaire's house. "I explore his most intimate secrets: I have almost, *longo intervallo*, become him." To my mind, the central thread linking the multifarious activities of Besterman's life follows the stages of that idolatry, as if, through a feat of transubstantiation, he did indeed pass over to the other side and, in effect, become Voltaire.

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A student of parapsychology, Theodore Besterman was appointed, while still a young man, first the editor and then the chief investigating officer of the Society for Psychical Research in London. By the mid-1930s, his works on crystal gazing, divining rods, and mediums had established his reputation as one of the world's foremost authorities on mental telepathy and clairvoyance. In true Voltairean fashion, however, he was convinced that nearly all of the paranormal phenomena reported in his own journal were quackery, and his determination to expose most fortune-tellers as charlatans so enraged Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and the Society's other unshakeable believers in the existence of fairies that, before he resigned himself, Besterman managed to drive out most of the Society's members, leaving only the skeptics and scientists inside. In 1938 he was selected to run against Anthony Eden as the Labour Party's parliamentary candidate for the constituency of Warwick and Leamington and attracted much attention from the press, not only because he defended free speech both in denouncing the Black Shirts and in supporting their right of assembly, but also because he was the only candidate of any party whose main hobby was reported to be the breeding of Siamese cats. On account of the outbreak of war, there would be no election until 1945, by which time Besterman chose not to stand again. In his speeches he was generous to his opponent, who opposed Neville Chamberlain's policy of appeasement, and the two men were thereafter to retain a lifelong affection for each other. Besterman was even accorded a fair chance of winning the seat, and if he had done so it is almost inconceivable that he would have failed to become Prime Minister some years later.

A publishing impresario along lines later pursued by Robert Maxwell, he took advantage, first of his post as lecturer at the University College London School of Librarianship and, after the war, as the head of UNESCO's Department for the International Exchange of Information, to launch the series *Bibliographies of Bibliographies,* eventually regaining and even surpassing the fortune he had lost when German bombs destroyed his first publishing house in the blitz of 1940. Voltaire himself had not been more enterprising or productive. Besterman assembled the world's largest private collection of Voltaire's letters, a project that led to his establishment of the Institut Voltaire in 1951. By the time of his death in 1976, he had seen through the press 160 volumes of his *Studies on Voltaire,* which under his direction became the principal academic journal devoted to the Enlightenment, together with 107 volumes of Voltaire's *Correspondence,* 50 volumes of the so-called definitive edition of that same correspondence, the first 27 volumes of Rousseau's *Correspondance complète,* and much else besides.

In a career wholly dedicated to following in his hero's footsteps, Besterman also had occasion to flee persecution in France and find

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refuge in England, much as Voltaire had done in 1726, following his release from the Bastille after a brawl with a nobleman. In the summer of 1971, in circumstances so remarkable that if they had not actually transpired it would have been necessary to invent them, agents of Interpol attempted to serve a warrant for Besterman's arrest at the very moment that, at Nancy, he was addressing several hundred members of the International Congress of the Enlightenment, which he had founded. If the warrant had been served, he would have been obliged to respond to charges in connection with irregularities in his bequest and sale of manuscripts to the city of Geneva. But in the face of such mishaps, he showed all the resilience of Voltaire's Candide. He escaped, settled with the Genevan authorities out of court, and used his surviving fortune to create a second Voltaire foundation, now connected with the University of Oxford, while the first continues to flourish as well, all of its locks having been changed on the last day Besterman set foot there.

His life's greatest work, encapsulating his achievements in so many domains, was to be the *Correspondence of Voltaire*, of which he was both editor and publisher, and whose notes and critical apparatus, in recognition of the extent of the aid he had won from the numerous French and Swiss foundations he approached, were produced in English. The first three volumes of what he conceived to be our epoch's most towering monument of literary scholarship were issued simultaneously in 1953 and quickly gained the acclaim he was certain that he and they merited. The assessment of their quality offered the following year in the *Modern Language Review*, however, was rather less flattering. In drawing up a comprehensive catalogue of dubious readings, improbable chronologies, and other blunders made by an editor described as "gossipy, importunate, otiose and unsystematic," the reviewer concluded that the latest edition of Voltaire's *Correspondence* was "not so good as it might be."

This reviewer was Ralph Leigh, a man Besterman had never met. Born in London in 1915, Leigh had been educated at Raine's School for Boys and Queen Mary College, London, thanks to his success at winning an open scholarship in each case. After wartime duties in the Royal Service Army Corps, he became a lecturer in French at the University of Edinburgh in 1946, and in 1951 he took up a fellowship at Trinity College, Cambridge, in conjunction with a university appointment in French. In their first exchange of letters, in August 1954, Besterman remonstrated with Leigh for the tone of his comments, for their animus, and for what he termed "your lack of a humanistic scale of values." He also took the precaution of writing to the assistant editor of the *Modern Language Review*, instructing her to send

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no further volumes of the *Correspondence* for assessment by Dr. Leigh. That letter was passed on to Leigh, who strongly objected to the sanction imposed upon a reviewer by Voltaire's editor and publisher. "I cannot bring myself to believe that you really wish to purchase immunity from criticism in this way," he wrote to Besterman, "nor that Voltaire himself would have approved of this infraction of a principle he so persistently defended: the principle of free speech." From that inauspicious beginning was launched a correspondence that would grow to many hundreds of letters—the most voluminous that either man ever exchanged with any other person. For the next twenty-two years their exchanges bore all the qualities of bitter conceit, bantering wit, and boundless exasperation that had marked the relations between Rousseau and Voltaire themselves over a period of comparable length, their reciprocal mistrust of one another thereby reinvigorated in the equally parallel lives of their editors.

Besterman's outrage in response to what he took to be the caviling criticism of an upstart reviewer was nevertheless soon tempered by his recognition of Leigh's exceptional gifts as a scholar, and by the prospect of his gaining access to Leigh's corrections in advance of the publication of further volumes of the *Correspondence of Voltaire.* Swallowing his pride, he invited Leigh to join his advisory committee and then appointed him to the committee superintending the publication of his new edition of the *Complete Works of Voltaire.* Finally, in 1977, Leigh was made a Director of the Voltaire Foundation itself, of which he remained a guiding spirit until his death a decade later.

Long before his first exchanges with Besterman, Leigh had formed the view that the standard edition of the correspondence of Rousseau, which dated from the mid-1920s and on which numerous prizes had been lavished, was, as he put it, "one of the most extraordinary hoaxes ever perpetrated on the world of learning." Planning at first to produce a supplementary volume of corrections designed to accompany this set, he became convinced that the whole task had to be undertaken afresh, and when in 1956 Besterman invited him to publish a new edition of Rousseau's correspondence with the Voltaire Foundation, he eagerly accepted that challenge. The ambivalent working relationship that resulted brought great pain as well as pleasure to both men, with mutual respect all too often overshadowed by mutual reproach and remonstrance.

Besterman and Leigh had much in common. Each came to appropriate a major subject of study in eighteenth-century French literature and intellectual history, and through his industry and unrivalled command of his sources, each would become the world's foremost specialist in his field. Since neither Leigh nor Besterman was a native speaker of the French language, moreover, both were plainly outsiders in the

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domains they had colonized, and both met with some distrust from leading figures of the French academy—as would no doubt have been the case in England, if responsibility for the definitive editions of the correspondence of Locke or Pope, in one case annotated in French, had passed into the hands of foreigners appointed by Gallimard. Not only were Besterman and Leigh both outsiders in France and Switzerland, but to their critics they also seemed estranged from the main institutions of academic luster in Britain: Besterman because he had had no university education at all and had never formed the university links that might have helped him to fund his research; Leigh because he had become a fellow of a Cambridge college without passing through either Cambridge or Oxford as an undergraduate.

In addition to their common industry and overlapping areas of expertise, Besterman and Leigh displayed similar streaks of vanity and a shared predilection for sarcasm that could be caustic but also amusing, sometimes drawing them together over dinner at meetings of the Johnson Club, of which both were members. Anyone foolish enough to express gratitude for an honorable mention in a footnote of the correspondence of either Voltaire or Rousseau could be quickly reminded of precisely what such mention had in fact bestowed: not mere honor, but immortality. When informed at a conference of editors in France that he would be permitted just twenty minutes to introduce his subject, Besterman, who had anticipated greater reverence, replied that he would therefore deal with a thousand letters a minute. Leigh's widely remembered apology for arriving late at a college meeting, moreover—which he said had unfortunately prevented him from hearing the more persuasive part of the previous speaker's testimony—might well have been uttered by either man. But neither their shared interests, nor any mutual sense of estrangement, nor their common vanity or wit could overcome the fracture caused by each man's fundamental allegiance to his subject. No less than Besterman, Leigh was cast in the image of his hero, and it is inconceivable, from their predecessors' conflicting accounts of public morality, of the nature of religious belief, and, indeed, of the whole course of civilization, that Rousseau's shadow could ever be drawn to Voltaire's ghost.

Of the intrinsic significance of his subject, Leigh never entertained the slightest doubt. Rousseau was an outstanding writer, a profoundly influential thinker, and a fascinating personality—"a colossus of European cultural history," as anyone seeking a good reason to read a fresh edition of his correspondence was reminded in Leigh's preface to the first volume, published in 1965. By the time of his death in 1987, forty-six volumes had appeared, and he had, as well, virtually completed the last three, apart from the additional tomes of indices. Not least because Leigh's three million words of annotation surpassed the total of

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Rousseau's own contribution, he published no other full-length book in his lifetime, and were it not for the Sandars lectures he delivered at Cambridge, which were published posthumously, the only entry under his name in many library catalogues might well have instructed the reader to "see Rousseau." That doubtless would have pleased him.

To the editorial undertaking that was to become his own life's work, Leigh brought to bear a personality, a background, and a set of interests that were to grant him the same kind of privileged access to Rousseau's mind that Besterman had gained into Voltaire's through the long years that he crusaded for Voltairean causes before tucking up in Voltaire's bed. Leigh shared with Rousseau a difficult childhood, partly on account of financial hardship but much more because of the loss of his mother, who died suddenly when he was nine, whereas Rousseau's mother perished a couple of days after giving birth to him. Both of their fathers were artisans—Rousseau's a watchmaker and Leigh's a tailor—whose businesses failed to prosper, in each case particularly after the mother's death. Leigh also shared with Rousseau a profound love of music and a deeply poetic imagination; a delight in companionship whose requisite candor he all too frequently believed had been betrayed by others; a sense of moral outrage at political injustice in a world pervasively marked by the abuse of power; an intimate acquaintance (mainly through his college) with the manner in which conspiracies were formed; and a capacity to devise strategies for wholesale change by planting his feet firmly in the air.

No editor of a major correspondence was ever granted so much license by his publisher as Leigh won from Besterman. By the time Leigh had elected to pursue Rousseau's own correspondence beyond the grave so as to include all the documents surrounding his literary remains, together with those addressed to the festivals in his honor and the celebrations of his memory during the course of the French Revolution, Besterman was fortunately dead as well. But the volumes of Leigh's work whose publication Besterman did supervise were—on account of their depth, their range, and, above all, their length—already in every respect too much for him to bear. Leigh's notes, sometimes comprising several essays in connection with a single letter, were often much longer than the texts to which they were affixed. The documents he assembled—especially when they were not letters by or to Rousseau himself—seemed, to their publisher, to have no justification except to set the stage for editorial commentaries. Such extravagance at his expense was intolerable. "I never contemplated anything on this scale," Besterman lamented time and again, almost always to no avail, in reproaching Leigh for his presumption that his publisher had "a bottomless purse" and for his "unlimited willingness to dip into it." As the volumes of Leigh's work appeared, Besterman grew increasingly

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alarmed at their production costs, having imagined at first that they would quickly provide a profit for him. Eventually, as the number of subscribers grew, his rage subsided, and in due course he found that he could even manage a royalty for their editor.

For Besterman, however, the burgeoning popularity of Leigh's work proved a mixed blessing, in part because it even further diminished his authority over its editorial excesses, but principally because it undermined his stature as Voltaire's editor and amanuensis. By the early 1970s, Besterman found that the number of subscribers to Leigh's edition of Rousseau had overtaken that to his own edition of Voltaire. Worse still, by the sheer excellence of its annotation, Leigh's work appeared to upstage and outshine his own endeavors on behalf of *le roi soleil* of the Enlightenment—a feat all the more galling because readers of Voltaire's exchange of letters with Rousseau were turning increasingly to the deeply biased edition proffered by Rousseau's shadow, which had been published in bold print, on exceptionally fine paper, by Voltaire's ghost.

"You get more like J. J. R. every day," Besterman scolded Leigh in 1973, nineteen years after their first exchange, as if it were at last plain that the vitriol and arsenic which Voltaire had detected in Rousseau's veins had managed to contaminate his scribe. Only fitfully tempered by flashes of cordiality, the exchanges between Besterman and Leigh proceeded along such lines over the whole period of their association. If ever a history of their turbulent collaboration comes to be written, I believe it should bear, as its title, the opening line of a letter Besterman sent to Leigh in 1960: "Pistols for two and coffee for one!"

At almost every turn during their relationship, embracing the publication of both the Voltaire and the Rousseau correspondence, the two men rekindled the quarrel between the voluptuous mountebank, addicted to luxury, whom Rousseau had condemned for debasing the morals of his Genevan compatriots by electing to settle there, thus preventing Rousseau's own return to his homeland; and, on the other hand, the insufferable lunatic, that "bastard of Diogenes' dog" beset by paranoia, whose self-righteous unworldliness Voltaire decried because it betrayed the great cause of the Enlightenment simply in order to put a torch to himself. When Rousseau resisted the proposal made by d'Alembert in the *Encyclopédie* to establish a theater in Geneva on the grounds that it would render its citizens mere spectators of their entertainments rather than active participants in festivals, he imagined that this scheme originated with Voltaire. He did not at first suspect, however, that Voltaire was the author of the pamphlet entitled "Sentiment des citoyens," which denounced him for subverting the religion and government of the city *he* had betrayed, while contracting a vene-

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real disease, abandoning his children to an orphanage, and causing the death of his mistress's mother. Leigh's attribution of this text to Voltaire in an appendix of the *Correspondance* of Rousseau prompted Besterman to revise his biography of Voltaire, whose third edition dismisses the charge and points readers instead to the common sense and sound advice that Voltaire offered but Rousseau failed to heed.

It would perhaps have been too much to hope for such matters to be set aside by Besterman and Leigh in their respective editorial notes. Voltaire and Rousseau met only once, inconsequentially, at a salon in Paris, before Rousseau had caught the public eye. But by 1778 their careers had become so inextricably intertwined that, as Rousseau himself reported, the demise of one required the decease of the other. They duly died that year within a space of five weeks. Between 1745 and 1765, they exchanged a dozen letters, beginning with Rousseau's effusive compliment to the effect that he had been working for fifteen years to make himself worthy of Voltaire's notice, and concluding with his accusation that Voltaire was a scoundrel for suggesting that he had not really been the secretary to the French ambassador in Venice but merely his valet. Among their letters was the first to bear Rousseau's famous signature "citoyen de Genève," as well as several containing some of the most striking passages in either man's correspondence. Voltaire's acknowledgement of his receipt of Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality* began, "I have read your new book against the human race. Thank you. . . . No one ever employed so much wit in order to make us animals . . . [but] I lost the habit of walking on all fours more than sixty years ago." In 1756, Rousseau sent Voltaire his celebrated letter on the subject of providence, to which Voltaire's response, he would later suggest, was to prove nothing other than *Candide*, although, as Rousseau remarked curtly in his *Confessions*, "I cannot speak of it, since I've not read it." In 1760, following the controversy surrounding the publication of his *Letter on the Theater*, Rousseau wrote to Voltaire: "I do not like you, sir. . . . You have destroyed Geneva. . . . I hate you really. . . . Adieu."

These letters were transcribed by Besterman and Leigh in their respective collections of the correspondence of Voltaire and Rousseau, within which, in each case, the editor contrived to have the last word on behalf of his subject. To the allegation that the letter Rousseau signed "citoyen de Genève" had been meant to pick a quarrel with Voltaire, Leigh replied bluntly that "this interpretation does not seem to me to be warranted by the text." To explain the true meaning of the lines that conclude Voltaire's letter about Rousseau's book against the human race, Leigh intercalated a whole appendix entitled "An invitation like no other." Voltaire remarked that he understood Rousseau was in poor health, and then wrote, "You should restore it in

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the air of your native country and drink with me the milk of our cows." In his reply, Rousseau observed, "I appreciate your invitation, and if my health this winter permits me to return to my homeland in the spring, I shall take advantage of your kindness." According to Leigh's reading of that exchange, "Voltaire seems to be saying, 'If you return to Geneva, please come to see me,' which is, moreover, exactly how Rousseau understood his meaning." In assembling at great length all the actual and legendary evidence with respect to the nature of Voltaire's offer of hospitality to Rousseau, Leigh concluded that "this is not one of those pressing invitations which inspire a person to pack his bags on the spot." As Besterman noted wearily about the same lines of Voltaire in his definitive edition of the *Correspondence*, "a vast and largely futile controversy has developed around [them]. I do not consider it to be the duty of an editor . . . to add to it, but those who have a taste for fine polemics can refer to the deplorably tendentious appendix in [volume eleven of] Leigh."

It was after the publication of the last volume of the *Correspondence* of Voltaire in 1965 that the *Correspondance* of Rousseau began to appear. The revised and allegedly definitive edition of Voltaire's *Correspondence* was launched in 1968, to the exasperation of librarians and book collectors everywhere, who had only just paid their last installment on the first set. Besterman must have imagined that he had compelling reasons—both academic and financial—for embarking on a new edition so quickly on the heels of its precursor. New Voltaire documents had been discovered or at last located, in many cases as a result of the publication of the original edition. A whole archive had even been released from the Saltykov-Shchedrine Library in St. Petersburg, thanks to Besterman's forthright request, made directly to Nikita Khrushchev (one premier to another, as it were), "to give orders that a microfilm should be sent to me . . . in the interests of international cultural cooperation."

But to the extent that the revisions of the definitive Voltaire edition also point to the inadequacies of the first, Leigh's *Correspondance* of Rousseau, interpolated between the two sets of Voltaire, may help to explain why Besterman came to judge his initial effort a false start. No doubt the great quarrel between Voltaire and Rousseau continues every night, in person, under the vault of the Panthéon, to which the ashes of each man were transported during the French Revolution. It would also be an ironic legacy of that quarrel if it proved that Rousseau's editor had driven his publisher to edit Voltaire a second time.

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The Legacy of a Lynching

ROBERT F. WORTH

In March 1996, a black rapper known as Wise Intelligent produced a CD titled "Killin' U For Fun." On the back cover there was a photograph of a charred body collapsed over a mound of coals, with a group of white men and boys in the background, some of them smiling and laughing. The image was so lurid that it made the *Washington Post*, along with a short description of the lynching, which was said to have taken place in Coatesville, Pennsylvania, in 1911, near the Worth Brothers Steel Company. "It's a black man being burned on the stake, crucified," Wise Intelligent told the *Post*. "And there's the Establishment looking on, loving the destruction of the black man in this picture."

I read those words with a jolt of recognition, because my great-grandfather owned and ran the steel mills that employed the victim and many of the men who burned him to death. The extended Worth family still lives indirectly on the profits from those mills, but few of us knew anything about the lynching. After the *Post* article came out, my cousin Lark, who lives in a town not far from Coatesville, wrote a letter to twenty-five relatives across the country, enclosing a local paper's version of the story. She told them that to the black population of Coatesville the lynching was still a live symbol of the town's racial inequities. Since Worth Brothers had been the town's largest employer, it was up to us to lead a "reconciliation" between the races—in short, to offer some sort of public apology to the black community of Coatesville.

By the time I saw the letter, my father had already told me how much it had upset some of our older cousins. They saw no need for an

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apology, since, after all, no family members had been part of the lynch mob. These relatives acknowledged Lark's good intentions but felt that resurrecting the lynching after eighty-five years wouldn't help, and that the less said, the better. On the other hand, some younger relatives, whether or not they felt a gesture of "atonement" would do any good, spent many hours debating the question of our family's special responsibility. Our great-grandfather was not a murderer, but we suspected that he had participated in Coatesville's collective refusal to acknowledge the crime. Some of my cousins were uneasy about continuing the family policy of turning our backs on what had happened. We began to ask ourselves some puzzling questions. Are we responsible for the misdeeds of our ancestors? If so, when does the statute of limitations run out? And are we more responsible if those ancestors have left us money?

Like Lark, I had grown up hearing stories about the Worth Brothers Steel Company, repeated like fragments of an old creation myth. I knew it had been sold long before I was born, but I also knew it was the reason my grandparents had lived on a large estate in Delaware's "chateau country," in a mansion staffed with maids and cooks. I also knew it had something to do with my own upbringing on Park Avenue and my education at expensive private schools. There was no crime in these things, but they made me all the more eager to dig through old newspaper articles and grand jury reports, talk to people whose parents might remember the lynching, and read everything that had been written about it. If I could not rectify the inequities of the past, at least I could learn exactly what had happened in Coatesville in 1911, and what my great-grandfather, William Penn Worth, had done about it.

The Worth family steel business came to Coatesville in 1852, when Shesbazzar Bentley Worth bought an existing ironworks and began remodeling it. In 1874 his son William Penn Worth, assisted by a younger brother, took over the company. Toward the turn of the century, as demand for steel shot up, the expanding mills began to look to the South and abroad for unskilled and semi-skilled laborers. My father remembers hearing a story about how his grandfather had hired southern black laborers to break a strike at the mills early in the century, but the truth appears to be less dramatic. Blacks, like the Eastern European immigrants who were flooding into Pennsylvania steel towns during the same period, were willing to work for lower wages. They were often recruited at railroad stations in Virginia and sent by special cars directly to Coatesville, where they were immediately put to work in the mills for fourteen or fifteen cents an hour, sixty hours a week. By 1911 their growing numbers had begun to breed resentment and anger among whites. On Saturday afternoons and evenings, the European and black steelworkers who crowded around Main Street were often so drunk

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and rowdy that American-born whites avoided the downtown area entirely. According to Dennis Downey and Raymond Hyser's book *Crooked Death* (my primary source for details about the lynching), many long-term residents became worried that the town's six-man police force might soon be incapable of controlling the violence.

The afternoon of Saturday, August 12, 1911, was a humid one, and the workers hanging around Main Street were as drunk and disorderly as usual. As evening approached, Zachariah Walker, a black lever-puller at Worth Brothers, started back toward his shack south of town. Walker had arrived recently from Virginia, where he had a wife and child. There is a rumor among black Coatesvilleans that he had spent the afternoon visiting a white woman, but newspaper records suggest that he had been loitering with a friend on Main Street. One thing seems certain: he was drunk. As he stumbled over the Brandywine Creek bridge in the twilight, he saw two Polish immigrants on the road ahead of him, pulled out his revolver, and fired two shots wildly into the air. Terrified, the Poles ran away.

Walker continued walking toward his shack. Edgar Rice, a security guard for Worth Brothers, had heard the shots, and he hurried from his post to see what was up. After crossing the bridge, he found Walker and promptly arrested him. Walker later confessed, "I knew if he would take me I would serve time for carrying concealed weapons, and I resisted him." Rice threatened to club Walker if he didn't give up his gun and surrender quietly. Walker shouted back, and Rice struck him several times before Walker tore the nightstick out of his hands. Panicking, Rice drew his gun, but Walker fired first. The impact knocked Rice down, and as he tumbled downhill, Walker shot him twice more. Rice rolled to a stop, staggered to the bottom of the hill, and collapsed, dying, on the darkened porch of a small store. In less than half an hour his body would be discovered by another security guard.

Meanwhile, Zachariah Walker stumbled up to the crest of the bluff overlooking Brandywine Creek. He sat there for several hours, sipping gin from a flask, while the town slowly erupted before his eyes. The police soon established Walker's identity with the help of the immigrants he had frightened earlier. As word of the murder spread, informal posses formed to supplement the police and fire company search teams. Men could be seen charging through the streets and scouring the woods and fields on the edge of town. The commotion went on for hours, even after a summer storm drenched the search parties. It was not until one o'clock in the morning that things quieted down. Tired and drunk, Walker stopped by his shack and then lay down in the haymow of a nearby barn.

It was broad daylight when he awoke. He got up and began walking quickly down a dirt road, where he was immediately spotted by two

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men from a search party. They tried to apprehend him, but Walker fought them off, escaped to a nearby cherry orchard, and climbed a tree. For the next few hours he clutched the trunk in terror, scarcely moving as the search parties passed and re-passed almost directly beneath him. "I knew it was all up with me," he said later. "When some of the men surrounded me, I thought I would end it all and sent a bullet into the back of my head." The bullet penetrated his jaw instead, shattering the bone, and Walker fell to the ground unconscious, right at the feet of one of his search parties.

News of Zachariah Walker's apprehension spread so fast that by the time he was carried into the Coatesville Hospital, almost two thousand people were gathered outside to cheer his captors. Some of them were already beginning to mutter that the "damned nigger" ought to be lynched. Inside the hospital, a doctor performed surgery on his head wound. As Walker regained consciousness, chief of police Charles Umsted and district attorney Robert Gawthrop began to question him. Wrapped in a canvas straitjacket, his ankle shackled to the iron post of his bed, Walker confessed to the murder but claimed he had acted in self-defense. Umsted and Gawthrop then left the hospital, leaving one man—officer Stanley Howe—to guard the wounded captive. Gawthrop caught the last train back to West Chester after taking the precaution of asking that the hotel bars along Main Street refrain from serving liquor for a couple of days.

Chief Umsted, who was in an expansive mood, strolled over to the firehouse and began chatting about Walker's confession with a reporter for the *Coatesville Record.* Umsted was a big man, six feet three and over 250 pounds, known familiarly as "Jumbo" or "Jummy." He had a reputation for toughness and a well-honed facility for surviving the fiercely contested elections for town police chief. ("Jummy knows what we want" is the way the steel executives put it, according to one historian.) Umsted was up for re-election in September, and on the night of August 13, as the crowd around him grew, he saw a chance to earn a few votes. Taking care to speak loudly enough for bystanders to eavesdrop, he avowed that Walker had boasted about killing Rice, and he made no mention of Walker's claim of self-defense. Hearing this, Mordecai Markward, assistant chief of the fire company, began to grow anxious about the crowd's increasingly violent mood, and he sidled up to Umsted, quietly suggesting that he change the subject. "I must be drawing flies," Umsted said dismissively, and went on talking. After a few more minutes he ended his monologue by virtually promising the mob that he would not intervene in the event of a lynching: "It would be the devil if somebody should happen to go after that fellow. . . . Gentlemen, allow me to say that I am not going to get hurt."

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As Umsted ambled away, Sunday evening church services were just ending, and the congregations streamed straight from church into the gathering lynch mob. A teenager stood up and shouted that it would be easy to lynch Walker because there was only one man guarding him. The crowd roared its approval. Inside the hospital, officer Howe and the hospital superintendent, a middle-aged woman named Lena Townsend, began to panic. Miss Townsend dialed police headquarters and got no answer. She tried the Brandywine Fire Company, then every other number she could think of. No one answered. Finally, she left a desperate message with the operator and ran to lock the two screen doors that led to the hospital porch.

Umsted had not answered the telephone at police headquarters because by now he was chatting with the justice of the peace, an old friend of his. When Mordecai Markward warned him that a lynching was about to occur, the police chief waved him away: "That is all hot air; there is no danger." Twenty minutes later, Al Berry—the leader of the search party that had found Walker—ran up. He had been searching for Umsted all over town, and now he told him that a lynching was surely about to take place. "I don't want to hear anything about it," Umsted said angrily, adding that the crowd was nothing but a bunch of teenage hooligans. Berry said he had personally prevented his men from lynching Walker earlier in the day. When Umsted told him to mind his own business, Berry became furious. "You have been warned about this," he shouted. "It is up to you to do your duty. . . . I wash my hands of the whole matter."

Not long afterward, a friend of Umsted's ran up with a message from the chairman of the city council's police committee: Umsted was needed at the hospital immediately, and he had permission to call out the sixteen volunteer firemen. Umsted angrily replied that he would do no such thing. A few minutes later, a messenger from the Stephenson Hotel ran out and shouted that there was an emergency phone call. Umsted went to the phone and heard a stranger's voice shouting frantically that the mob was taking Walker away. Finally, the police chief agreed to drive to the scene of the crime.

It was too late. The mob had stormed onto the hospital porch and then, ignoring the desperate pleas of the staff, had broken through the front doors. Fearing for his life, officer Howe gave way. About a dozen men, many of them wearing handkerchiefs over their faces, ran past him, yelling at the top of their lungs. They found Walker's room and tore off his straitjacket. Unable to break the leg shackle, they wrenched the footboard off the bed and dragged Walker screaming from the hospital, blood trailing from his opened head wound. The crowd outside cheered as they saw him pulled down the steep hospital steps, and a rough gauntlet was formed, with the men taking turns kicking and pelting their captive with sticks and stones. Taking care not to kill him too soon, the

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mob dragged him down the road toward East Fallowfield Township, outside the jurisdiction of the Coatesville police force. When Umsted arrived at the hospital, Walker's agonized screams were still audible in the distance, but he made no effort to follow them. Instead, he walked casually back to town.

The mob's leaders dragged Walker half a mile, stopping in a clearing bordered by split-rail fences just beyond the Newlin farmhouse. It made a good theater, and the all-white crowd—now nearly four thousand strong—poured up from the road to take their places. As men ran back and forth from the barn with dry straw and firewood, Walker shouted from the fence railing: "For God's sake, give a man a chance! I killed Rice in self-defense. Don't give me no crooked death because I ain't white!" But the fire was soon blazing up, illuminating the faces not only of men but also of women and children, who had been drawn by the commotion on their way home from church.

Within minutes Walker was hurled onto the pyre, his body quickly enveloped in flames. The crowd roared its approval, and those close to the fire hunched forward, according to a newspaper report, "eagerly watching the look of mingled horror and terror that distorted his blood-smeared face." As the flames scorched his skin, Walker let out a series of awful screams that were heard, according to later testimony, almost a mile away. He seemed close to death when he managed, somehow, to crawl out of the fire. Still breathing, he reached the fence, his back—as one boy later testified—"all raw" with burns. The onlookers paused in shock for a moment; no one had anticipated this. Then several of them beat him or pushed him with fence rails back into the flames. Shrieking with pain, Walker managed to struggle out a second time, still shackled to the burning footboard. According to witnesses, when he was pushed back in again, his flesh was visibly hanging from his body. To the crowd's amazement, Walker struggled out of the fire a third time. This time they allowed him to crawl almost to their feet, astonished and horrified by what one reporter called "the revolting spectacle his maimed and half-burned body presented to them." Finally, several men swung a rope around his neck, holding it taut at both ends, and pulled him back into the coals. His resistance gone, Zachariah Walker gave one last terrible scream and collapsed. His body was soon obscured by a wall of fire, and the smoke carried the smell of roasting human flesh into the night sky.

The following day, the *Coatesville Record* remarked on the politeness of the crowd: "Five thousand men, women, and children stood by and watched the proceedings as though it were a ball game or another variety of spectator sport." Boys had stopped for cold soda afterward at the Coatesville Candy Company to retell the story. Many returned to

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the site the next day to gather fragments of bone and charred flesh as souvenirs.

It was not until later on Sunday that district attorney Robert Gawthrop announced his intention to prosecute the lynchers to the full extent of the law. "We will clear this thing up if it takes ten years to do it," he said. The governor of Pennsylvania returned hastily from a trip to New York City and ordered the state attorney general and his deputy to assist in the investigation. Newspapers around the country expressed amazement that a lynching could take place as far north as Pennsylvania.

In fact, it was Pennsylvania's second and last lynching, though lynchings were still occurring with relative frequency in the South and would continue there well into the 1920s. A black man was lynched in Oklahoma on the same day as Walker, but his death received a tiny notice in the back pages of the *New York Times*, while the Coatesville lynching was front-page news two days in a row. Predictably, rumors spread in Coatesville about a group of southern strangers who had allegedly arrived in town on the night of the lynching. Several southern newspapers touted Walker's lynching as evidence of northern hypocrisy, and even the *Washington Post* responded with an editorial titled "Northern Pot and Southern Kettle."

My great-grandfather and most of his family were away at the New Jersey shore when the lynching occurred. By the time they returned a week or so later, talk of it was consuming the town. They could not have avoided it, since one of their cars had been commandeered by the search parties, and many—if not most—of their white employees had been part of the mob. By order of the governor, seventeen state policemen had arrived in town to patrol every neighborhood in the borough and collect information. Nine men were arrested, including several Worth employees. In early September a grand jury convened, and district attorney Gawthrop declared: "If the informal information we possess is accurate, never has [a] more fiendish, cowardly crime been committed; never has the law more recklessly and wantonly been defied."

This sentiment echoed throughout the country—or at least throughout the North, where the brutal manner of the lynching, rather than its racial implications, elicited shock and outrage. *The Outlook*, a magazine based in New York City, declared Coatesville "A BLOT ON CIVILIZATION," and Theodore Roosevelt wrote that any Coatesville residents who refused to come forward or testify were "on a level of criminality with their victim."

Under this fierce scrutiny, Coatesville closed ranks. Of the more than four thousand people who participated, few testified for the grand jury, and those who admitted to having been present at the lynching generally claimed to remember nothing and to have recog-

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nized no one. Charles Umsted, of course, was never charged with obstruction of justice; in fact, he was re-elected chief of police by a landslide vote less than two months after the lynching. As the trials proceeded through the fall and winter, evidence against a few of the ringleaders accumulated. Nonetheless, the juries acquitted every suspect, often after deliberating for only a few minutes. An effort to move the trials to another county failed. Finally, in May, the prosecutors managed to construct what looked like an airtight case. A man named Lewis Denithorne had signed a written confession, admitting to having taken part in almost every phase of the lynching. Gawthrop charged him with second-degree murder, avoiding the death penalty in order to increase the chances of conviction. The jury took less than half an hour to reach its verdict: not guilty.

After that frustrating defeat, Gawthrop decided that any future efforts on his part would be futile. He amazed the courtroom by declaring that "the Commonwealth has now arrived at the point in the Coatesville lynching cases where she feels that it is absolutely impossible for her to secure any convictions in any of the cases." To pursue further convictions, he said, would "only tend to humiliate the administration of justice." He recommended that all future cases be submitted serially to the jury and that a verdict of not guilty be pronounced for each one. The presiding judge, William Butler, responded to Gawthrop's request with an even more unusual comment of his own. "It certainly is a very sad situation in which we find ourselves," he began. The evidence in the Denithorne trial, he said, "was an absolute demonstration of the defendant's guilt. There was substantially nothing presented in the way of answer. The defendant did not even take the stand to say he was not guilty." He concluded that it appeared to be "impossible to get twelve men in this county . . . who could, no matter what the evidence is, bring themselves to convict anybody who was connected with this offense. I repeat, I do not say that in criticism, I say it in sorrow." Butler accepted Gawthrop's request to drop all the remaining cases.

The outcome of the trials brought Coatesville as much bad publicity as the lynching had. The *Philadelphia Bulletin* headlined a denunciatory story "COATESVILLE'S FINAL SHAME." There was an effort to remove Coatesville's town charter. Some Coatesvilleans claim that the town was actually removed for years from several road atlases.

And what was William Penn Worth doing while all this was going on? As far as I have been able to determine, absolutely nothing. He did not assist the investigations in any way. Worth Brothers was, of course, the town's largest employer, and many of its fifteen hundred workers must have joined the mob to ensure that Edgar Rice, the beloved company security guard whom Zachariah Walker had killed, was avenged. In fact, several of the indicted ringleaders were Worth employees. But my

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great-grandfather did not fire a single one of them. In all likelihood, he saw the whole affair as beneath him. He had a reputation as an arrogant man who thought nothing of keeping the Philadelphia train waiting for him if he happened to be late. He was also a savvy executive, and he probably suspected that taking an unpopular stand on the lynching would cause trouble at the mills. I suspect he wished the scandal would just blow over, the sooner the better.

The rest of the family took the same attitude. My grandfather was nineteen at the time, preparing to join the family business after he finished college. He could hardly have avoided hearing and reading about the lynching. Yet no one recalls him mentioning it. My father and his brothers don't remember any discussions of it when they were young, and the same is true of my cousin and her family. My oldest uncle has vivid memories of visiting Coatesville as a small boy. His grandfather had died by then. He remembers playing 78s on the old Victrola on the top floor of the house. One of his favorites, he says, was called "All Coons Look Alike to Me." But he does not remember any mention of a lynching.

My cousin Lark, as it happens, is not the first person who has wanted to apologize for the Coatesville lynching. In August 1912, exactly one year after it occurred, the New York political activist and writer John Jay Chapman came to town. Chapman was a descendant of John Jay, the *Federalist Papers* author, and he had been raised with a stern sense of his own duty to the republic. He had singlehandedly written and published a reformist journal in New York around the turn of the century, establishing a reputation as a fiercely independent moralist. Some of his friends, including Theodore Roosevelt, thought his vision of rectitude bordered on the insane. As a student at Harvard, he had punished himself for unjustly beating another boy by holding his fist over a torch, burning it so badly that it had to be amputated the next day. No one ever accused Chapman of compromise. Edmund Wilson, who called him "the best letter-writer we have ever had in this country," also said, "There can have been few codes of morality ever formulated so individualistic as John Jay Chapman's."

Chapman had watched the lynching trials closely, and as the first anniversary approached, he decided that there had to be a reckoning of some kind. "I felt as if the whole country would be different if one man did something in penance," he wrote later to a friend, "and so I went to Coatesville and declared my intention of holding a prayer meeting to the various businessmen I could buttonhole." The attempted buttonholees must have included my great-grandfather or his brother, but they apparently wanted nothing to do with him. There was, Chapman decided, "a reign of terror in Coatesville at this moment. If you speak of it [the lynching] you are suspect." After an initial

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refusal, the *Coatesville Record* agreed reluctantly to advertise for Chapman's prayer meeting, to be held in a rented storeroom downtown. Only two people showed up: a black woman from Boston and a stranger who Chapman believed had been hired to spy on the proceedings.

Nonetheless, Chapman delivered the sermon he had prepared. "We are met to commemorate the anniversary of one of the most dreadful crimes in history," he began, "not for the purpose of condemning it, but to repent of our share in it." He explained that the crime in question was not just the burning of one man, but the larger history that made Americans blind to the humanity of black men and women.

> [T]his great wickedness that happened in Coatesville is not the wickedness of Coatesville nor of today. It is the wickedness of all America and of three hundred years—the wickedness of the slave trade. All of us are tinctured by it. No special place, no special persons, are to blame. A nation cannot practice a course of inhuman crime for three hundred years and then suddenly throw off the effects of it.

The legacy of slavery, said Chapman, was visible not only in the barbaric cruelty of lynching, but also in the coldness with which people stood by and watched it, or allowed it to happen, or refused to speak of it. "You might call it," he said, "the paralysis of the nerves about the heart in a people habitually and unconsciously given over to selfish aims."

It is this same paralysis that bothers my cousin Lark. She feels that our family's failure to speak out about the lynching, both at the time and in later years, amounts to a continuation of the silence that frustrated justice during the trials in 1912. Coatesville, after all, remained a town of deep racial divisions long after the lynching. As one elderly black resident told me, when I asked him about the lynching on one of my recent visits to Coatesville, "It's like smoke after a fire. Without wind, it hovers for a long time." Lark believes that by remaining silent, and perhaps also by reaping large profits from the steel industry, we Worths have helped to maintain the cruelties that slavery made possible.

Whether or not one accepts this view, there is no doubt that raising the issue of slavery often pushes people into an attitude of hostile defensiveness. When Lark spoke to our relatives about a public family atonement, many of them over-reacted, refusing to acknowledge that we had any connection with the lynching at all. They pointed out that Worth Brothers had been sold long ago. (There is a family story about William Penn Worth walking down Coatesville's Main Street with a check for $11 million in his pocket.) They reminded her that

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Zachariah Walker was guilty of murder. They insisted angrily that they had black friends or had sent checks to the NAACP. One of them even suggested that the lynching might have been a myth, invented for political purposes.

But there were more substantial objections to Lark's proposal. How does one go about apologizing for something other people did eighty-five years ago? Religions have institutionalized their own ways of expressing collective penitence, such as the Jewish Day of Atonement. The Southern Baptist Convention issued an apology in 1995 for its role in perpetuating slavery. In 1997, the federal government apologized for having funded a forty-year experiment that allowed black men with syphilis to suffer and die untreated. I had never heard, though, of a *family* offering a formal apology. Lark said in her letter that she wanted to raise the issue with local religious congregations and then form a coalition to speak to the black community. What would we tell them? We're sorry our great-grandfather closed his eyes to racial injustice? We're sorry we now live in all-white suburbs or on the Upper East Side, while you still live on the wrong side of Coatesville?

And who would be listening? Chapman clearly wrote his sermon with a mostly white audience in mind; it was printed in *Harper's* magazine a few months later. That made sense, because in 1912 white Americans needed to be reminded of the legacy of slavery. Their attitudes were actively keeping black people poor and powerless throughout much of the country. Chapman's speech was not just symbolic; it was a challenge to the reigning orthodoxy.

Still, a real apology should be addressed to the people who have been injured, and in this case Zachariah Walker and his family were long dead. Also, there was another, equally important concern. As one older relative told me in a hushed, angry voice, "This thing could blow up in our faces and innocent people would be hurt. It's the past, why bring it back? We want to look to the future." The occasion was a Sunday morning late last summer, and we were standing by the Worth family's Quaker meetinghouse in Romansville, a few miles from Coatesville. My relative was clearly upset about Lark's letter. "The child means well," she went on, "but we're the only ones who live in Coatesville. And the situation there is bad enough already; anything could set it off." She had a point. Her family lives on the edge of town, and they have had trouble with drug dealers and prostitutes coming up the hill onto their land. There had already been a number of shootings in Coatesville that summer. The memory of the lynching could easily provoke other, more recent frustrations to erupt into violence.

Wise Intelligent, the rapper who used the lynching photograph on his CD jacket—no one knows if it is authentic or how it surfaced—had already made this equation in his interview with the *Washington Post.*

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"They're cutting minority-based scholarships," he said, "they're cutting affirmative action, the inner cities are given the poorest systems of education in the country—and that's burning the black man at the stake!" That kind of racial anger, in combination with liberal self-blame, could prove toxic. "If we were to apologize for the lynching," my relative told me, "we'd just be setting ourselves up as a target. People would come up the hill and burn our house down."

Even if no one got hurt, an apology might seem more like self-indulgence than like real remorse. Indeed, most of the black men and women I have spoken with in Coatesville are inclined to see it this way. "The lynching only comes up when a white person talks about it," says Paul Johnson, a retired Chester County district judge who has lived all his life in Coatesville's all-black East End. Johnson grew up hearing stories about the lynching from his mother, who was ten years old when it happened. The stories became a kind of symbol for the persistent racial inequities of life in Coatesville. Black workers at Lukens Steel, which remained in town after Worth Steel left, were excluded from higher paying jobs and harassed when they tried to protest during the 1960s. In 1973 a group of steelworkers filed a class-action suit against Lukens, and in 1984 a U.S. district court judge found in their favor. Lukens offered the more than thirteen hundred black workers affected by the suit a settlement of $3.7 million, one-third of which went to the lawyers who represented them.

Johnson knew many of these men, and as a black district judge he often found himself caught in the racial crossfire. Blacks and some liberal whites accused him of sending too many poor blacks and Puerto Ricans to jail, yet he was voted out in 1994, after ten years as a judge, when his opponent successfully labeled him "too easy on black drug dealers." Nowadays Johnson works informally for Faith at Work, a group of black and white ministers who are seeking racial reconciliation in the Coatesville area. They have made some progress. He says they try to avoid discussing the lynching, however, because it can only "twist the ankle again, bringing back the pain."

In the end, I had to agree with Paul Johnson. Thirty or forty years ago it might have done some good to acknowledge publicly that the Coatesville lynching was an act of barbarism. In a sense, this is what the civil rights movement was about: forcing whites to take an honest look at the consequences of their own racism. By the time I came of age in the 1980s, however, that rhetoric had begun to sound forced. After reading through the grand-jury documents and the old newspaper coverage of the lynching, I couldn't avoid the feeling that an apology like Chapman's, no matter how eloquent, would no longer mean much. Coatesville's worst problem is no longer racism. It is the by-products of

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racism. It is poverty and the things that go with it: drugs, crime, despair. These things may ultimately have their origin in slavery, but because the link is more insidious and harder to trace, they call for different responses. Apologies and manifestos mean less today than economic development. In fact, Lark has recently begun to think along the same lines, and, putting aside her proposed apology, is now urging family members to help raise money for a cultural center on Coatesville's Main Street. A number of us have helped out, and I think this approach—a more private form of reparation—is, at least in theory, the most practical way to do something for the town.

Unfortunately, economic development may come too late for Coatesville. Like many ghettos, the town has become a kind of sink that draws the poorest and most dysfunctional people from the surrounding areas. "The kids who want to work, leave," Paul Johnson told me, "so the suburbs look down on Coatesville." The Oak Street housing project, on Coatesville's south ridge, was notorious for years as a wholesale drug market, one of the largest on the East Coast. Most of it was closed down last year, and now it is empty. The town's population has been declining for years, along with housing values and the median household income. Lukens Steel has reduced its workforce over the past two decades from more than three thousand to less than one thousand. Main Street, once the commercial center of Chester County, has begun to resemble a ghost town, with drunks and addicts weaving past the abandoned storefronts at midday.

One day last fall I drove down to Coatesville from my home in Brooklyn to visit the site of the lynching. Zachariah Walker died on a hill just off the road that leads southward out of town, not far from the old hospital, which has become a retirement home. The road passes a power station and curves westward past the site of the old Newlin farm, now a patch of grass and stone. Accompanying me were two local men, one black, one white, who are helping to raise money for the new Coatesville cultural center. The three of us got out of the car and walked up a hill covered with tall, dry grass and late summer flowers. Below us, somewhere in the shadows beneath a grove of tall oak trees, was the spot where a human being had been burned alive eighty-six years before. But no ghosts seemed to linger in the air, and I couldn't shake the feeling that the real legacy of the lynching, if there was one, was elsewhere. So we got in the car and drove past the East End, where a group of young boys surrounded the car trying to sell us drugs, and past the abandoned Oak Street projects, with their long ugly porches of bullet-pocked concrete. Back on Main Street, we got out of the car and walked past the police station. Standing in front of it were a black teenager in handcuffs and a white police officer, his arms crossed, looking the other way.

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WILLIAM STAFFORD

Living on the Plains

Carefully, sending leaves always toward the sun,
a vine climbs its trellis—even today
honeysuckle means Dakota and long summer afternoons.

We lived by what the river did, and how
seasons curve into and away from each other,
leaning into your face and peering hard.

If you come back years later your name
will be there carved on the windowsill
in the hayloft, under the dust.

Time doesn't hurry any more the way
it did along about school bell or when
the clock heard night outside and the snow falling.

If you ever climb the map again
you could stop there and whisper a few hymns,
the ones that civilized Dodge, Cody, Abilene.

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Our Way Those Days Before These Days

Today a kind of sound shadow lulls along the street,
the quell of an August afternoon. Whatever
the earth intends, whatever hovers around
our town, waits for a signal from September.
And sometime if tomorrow comes maybe a bird
will call through the woods again and it will be
autumn, with blue and clouds, a breeze from the ocean
where dreamers go forth looking for selfhood.

When we scattered along through the forest eating
and chattering, often we'd stop in a clearing
where sunlight poured through, and we'd sing
for awhile before going on. One would
begin with a tune till the rest couldn't help it—
they'd have to join, often beating on a log
or stamping their feet on the ground in unison.

Often away off other groups would hear.
We'd know by their faint sounds imitating
ours. There were times when the wind
would carry that music while branches waved
high in the trees. Birds would join in
while our young ones danced back and forth,
Heaven there in the woods those days.

~ William Stafford, who died in 1993, was the recipient of a National Book Award for *Traveling through the Dark,* and a Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress. These poems are from *The Way It Is: New & Selected Poems* by William Stafford, which will be published this April by Graywolf Press.

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Etymological Dirge

HEATHER McHUGH

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear . . .

Calm comes from burning.
Tall comes from fast.
Comely doesn't come from come.
Person comes from mask.

The kin of charity is whore,
the root of charity is dear.
Incentive has its source in song
and winning in the sufferer.

Afford yourself what you can carry out.
A coward and a coda share a word.
We get our ugliness from fear.
We get our danger from the lord.

Heather McHugh, Professor of English and Milliman Distinguished Writer-in-Residence at the University of Washington, Seattle, is the author of *To the Quick; Hinge & Sign: Poems 1968–1993*; *Broken English: Poetry and Partiality*, a collection of essays; and many other books. She received a Lila Wallace–Reader's Digest Writer's Award in 1996.

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Lightning and the Lightning Bug

The Craft of the Essay

VED MEHTA

In 1956, when I was twenty-two, I graduated from Pomona College, in California, and went up to Oxford. There I started working for a second bachelor's degree, for in those days the best way to take full advantage of what Oxford offered and to enter into the stream of English life was to work for an undergraduate degree at the university. I was reading history and was required to submit one or two essays a week to the scrutiny of my tutors, most of whom were world-class scholars. While I was reading aloud to my medieval tutor one of my first essays, on the Anglo-Saxons, he stopped me after the word *motivation* and asked why I tended to reach for jargon when a good English word was to hand.

"But everyone uses *motivation*," I protested.

"Jargon is imprecise and encourages weak thought," said my tutor. "A careful writer would use a word like *impulse*."

Until then, I had thought I was a tolerably good writer and had believed that after working over a draft several times I was able to say what I wanted to say. Indeed, before going up to Oxford, I had completed an entire book, an autobiography, much of which had been set down two years earlier, in the course of a summer. But I was so deeply in awe of Oxford and its tutorial system, and so impressionable, that my

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tutor's questioning of one infelicitous word effectively unraveled my confidence in my writing even as it began to sensitize me to the nuances of words. For some time thereafter, whenever I wrote a sentence, I would read it as my tutor might, and conclude that almost everything was wrong with it. I was reminded of an accomplished pianist friend who was then undergoing intense psychoanalysis and had become in the course of her treatment so self-conscious that she could scarcely play a five-finger exercise. But I felt sure that, just as her treatment contained the promise of her becoming a better pianist, so my Oxford education contained the promise of my becoming a better writer. The road, however, turned out to be a long and arduous one—and to stretch far beyond Oxford.

I recall how daunting were my first steps along that road. They led me to a chaos of randomly assembled materials that had to be subjected first to the elusive formulation of ideas and then to the untamable nature of language itself. I was constantly tempted to put off writing. There was always more to read, more to reflect on. I found I had first to decide what, exactly, I wanted to say, even if in the course of writing I should find myself saying something totally different. (All ideas grow and develop as one writes, I learned, since one's memory expands through the process of association.) Nevertheless, that initial idea, though it might be only the germ of one, enabled me to overcome the terror of the blank page. So as not to feel constrained or constricted, I would write what I came to call a "vomit draft," in which I would pour out everything I could think of without worrying about sense or grammar. Then I would start the process of revision. Cutting and shaping my thoughts helped me learn what, if anything, I knew about the subject. As I pressed on with my essay, I would try to come up with the most telling arguments or examples to buttress whatever point I was making. To locate them required me to interrupt the writing and go searching through many books. In time, I learned to find my way around indexes, tables of contents, and library catalogues. Sometimes I would put aside the essay and return later to cast a cold eye on it. The process as I describe it here may sound simple, but, as every student knows, it is turbulent and involves a lot of angst.

I remember that I was struck by the elegance and luster of many of the essays written by my English contemporaries. Compared to theirs, my best efforts came across as dull and lame. (In England, writing well in one's chosen subject is the foundation of a good education.) Before long, I discovered that many of the undergraduates I admired had developed their writing styles as schoolboys by imitating the styles of great authors or, if they were studying to be classicists, by translating Latin or Greek prose and verse into the styles of contemporary English authors, and vice versa. Sometimes these students wrote with a certain archness and artificiality, but I envied the facility and grace of expression that the

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best of them had developed. To cultivate ear and eye, some of them played a game that consisted of picking out characteristic passages from ancient and modern authors and seeing who could identify them. I tried to play the game, too, but because my knowledge of classical texts was either shaky or nonexistent, I was hopeless at it.

I confided my doubts about my schooling to my medieval tutor, and he said that he thought I needed to read more widely. I told him that since the age of fifteen, when I first started speaking English (I had grown up speaking Punjabi), I had done little besides read—and that, like many foreigners whose mother tongue was not English, I was an autodidact.

"Ah," he said. "But have you studied what makes one author's work different from another's?" My tutor explained that no piece of writing could prove effective and memorable unless its author found the right voice and the right style. For the study of these matters, he directed me to *The Oxford Book of English Prose*, a collection of choice morsels, mostly by British authors, culled and introduced by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch and published in 1925. It was a feast: Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Swift, Samuel Johnson, Lamb, Coleridge, Jane Austen, De Quincey, the Brontë sisters, Melville, Dickens, Arnold, Shaw, and many others. Over the next months and years, I returned to the book again and again. Genius being, by definition, inimitable and transcendent, the selections certainly didn't encourage me to attempt similar feats, but rather made anything I did attempt seem insipid by comparison.

Some young writers might find a study of the works of genius harmful, because it would discourage them from writing. They would do well to go their merry way and, like Walt Whitman, discover their inner resources on their own. How often have I met a mother who told me that her daughter wrote beautiful letters and would write a book if she could only find the time! Perhaps so. But, in my experience, for every natural writer there are ten or more writers who have to labor over their craft. Mark Twain once said, "The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and the lightning bug." Even so, it is hard to imagine Mark Twain, who made a virtue of seeming artless, studying the great writers of the past.

I myself found my study of the masters very helpful. Because I could savor only a few pages of *The Oxford Book of English Prose* at a sitting, I dipped into the volume whenever I had a little time, reading and rereading a selection to ponder its tone and cadence, its diction and imagery, its movement and structure. It gradually became clear to me that well-wrought sentences from different authors had a distinctive logic and beauty that could no more be tampered with than could the authors' signatures. Unquestionably, no two writers were alike, yet it took me a long time to discern just what stylistic characteristics made every writer

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different from every other and then to be able to put those differences into words.

The precision and finish of prose became a passion with me. It led me on to grammar books, most notably Fowler's *Modern English Usage*, and to essays, not only by authors in Quiller-Couch's anthology, which included nothing published after 1914, but also by twentieth-century authors: Virginia Woolf, of whose ardent prose it may be said, among other things, that it launched a whole new way of thinking and writing; Edmund Wilson, who encapsulated in sinewy prose the life, work, and critical value of great authors as if no one else had ever written about them; V. S. Pritchett, who never wrote a book review that didn't contain an unexpected image; and E. B. White, whose homey yet elegant turns of phrase made you think that no one could convey, for instance, the feel of the day better than he could.

Face to Face, the autobiography I had written before I went up to Oxford, was published in 1957, just after I completed my first year there, and by that time my writing style—indeed, my whole consciousness—had gone through such changes under the pressure of writing and rewriting my essays that I could scarcely bear to acknowledge its authorship. It seemed prosaic, and the story seemed to be carried along more by the nature of the material than by the force of the style. Perhaps as a result, my second book, *Walking the Indian Streets*, published three years later, when I had graduated from Oxford and was doing further study at Harvard, seemed to err in the opposite direction: style seemed to overshadow substance. It did, however, get me started on my vocation, because, in the course of working on it, I met William Shawn, the editor of *The New Yorker*.

That meeting began my long and happy relationship with the magazine. It lasted twenty-seven years, until the end of Shawn's editorship in 1987, and resulted in the publication of my second book and of sixteen others, all of which first appeared in *The New Yorker*. (In publishing entire books in installments, Shawn was following in the footsteps not only of his predecessor, Harold Ross, but also of the editors of many nineteenth-century periodicals.) Shawn himself was almost always my editor, and in the course of working with him, I absorbed his—and, by extension, his magazine's—principles of good writing, which were, as best I can sum them up, clarity, harmony, truth, and unfailing courtesy to the reader.

Like many other students and writers, I owe a debt of gratitude to my mentors—along with the literary masters I have read—for teaching me much about writing. In the mid-1980s, when Shawn's departure seemed imminent, and I was no longer able to count on making my living from writing alone, as I had done during most of my adult life, I myself taught writing at half a dozen colleges and universities. It is a truism that writing

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can't be taught the way history or physics can, so I was pleasantly surprised by how much progress was made by the students who were open to my suggestions, were attentive readers, and were patient during the various stages of writing and revising. Still, the best I could do as a teacher was to help students, in Emerson's words, "bear the fruit they were meant to bear," for ultimately, the voice that is best suited to both beginners and pros is the one that comes most naturally. It may take years to know what that voice is, but when one finds it there is a shock of recognition.

One kind of writing with which I feel particularly at home is literary journalism, a genre with a long lineage in English. One of the first English journalists was Joseph Addison, who, with Sir Richard Steele, founded *The Spectator*—a London daily that contained only one piece per issue—in 1711, and wrote a good deal of it himself. Samuel Johnson spelled out Addison's place in English letters: "He has restored virtue to its dignity, and taught innocence not to be ashamed. No greater felicity can genius attain than that of having purified intellectual pleasures, separated mirth from indecency . . . of having taught a succession of writers to bring elegance and gayety to the aid of goodness."

The pieces that Joseph Addison wrote and published in *The Spectator* and the pieces that William Shawn published in *The New Yorker* were not mere journalism. They both belonged to the more distinguished and more inclusive literary form known as the essay. The term *essai*, meaning attempt, was first used by Michel de Montaigne in the sixteenth century. "Could my mind find a firm footing, I should not be making essays, but coming to conclusions," he wrote in "On repentance." "It is, however, always in its apprenticeship and on trial." Montaigne's essays—on repentance, on idleness, on experience, on the imagination, on the education of children, on friendship, on smells, and on cannibals, among other topics—were often self-portraits. "Others shape the man; I portray him," he wrote, "and offer to the view one in particular, who is ill-shaped enough, and whom, could I refashion him, I should certainly make very different from what he is. But there is no chance of that."

The essay had its greatest flowering in England. Growing out of the literary and philosophical essays of Francis Bacon in the late sixteenth century and the autobiographical essays of Abraham Cowley in the seventeenth, it became an instrument of reformist satire in the eighteenth, and came into its own in the nineteenth, when such writers as Coleridge, Lamb, Carlyle, De Quincey, Macaulay, and Mill used it to deal with a great variety of subjects. Their style was forged in an age when all men of letters were trained in Greek and Latin. During school and university, they all read the same texts, they all belonged to the same community of readers, and yet each of them consciously sought to cultivate an indi-

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vidual voice. They specialized in what today we would call opinion pieces, yet their opinions, sometimes expressed in grandiloquent styles, were often based on the works of their predecessors and their contemporaries. As Montaigne had put it, "Is not the principal and most famous branch of modern learning that of learning to understand the learned? Is not this the common and final purpose of all studies? Our opinions are grafted one on another. The first serves as a stock for the second, the second for the third. We thus climb the ladder, step by step; and hence it is that the man who has mounted highest has often more honor than he deserves; for he has only raised himself by the height of one inch on the shoulders of the last but one."

Sometimes Montaigne's man didn't raise himself at all, because his foothold was on rungs of opinion only, and opinions, by their very nature, are idiosyncratic and slippery. For instance, not only Johnson but also Pope, Thackeray, and Macaulay made extravagant claims for the genius of Addison, with Macaulay going so far as to compare him to Shakespeare and Cervantes. Yet Virginia Woolf, in *The Common Reader*, dismissed Addison as "a writer of the second class" who had "little to give us." She maintained that what writers such as Addison liked is no longer what readers in the modern period like. "As the charm of their writing depends much more upon taste than upon conviction," she wrote, "a change of manners is often quite enough to put us out of touch altogether. . . . [Addison] was extremely fond of saying that men ought not to be atheists, and that women ought not to wear large petticoats. This directly inspires in us not so much a sense of distaste as a sense of difference." Whether we read Addison's admirers and detractors for the sheer pleasure of their writing or because we agree with their opinions, we may in the end come away learning more about the writers themselves than about Addison.

In our century, the form of the essay has been so thoroughly transfigured as sometimes to include no explicit opinion whatever, but rather to consist of a combination of implicit opinion and reporting. Moreover, whereas many earlier essays tended to be short, expository, and formal, and often made an appeal to the intellect, the essays of our day tend to be long, personal, and informal, and often make an appeal to our emotions. (James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* comes to mind.) Indeed, in Ross's and Shawn's *New Yorker*, narratives of fact and quoted speech were considered superior to pieces expressing explicit opinions, as if facts were precious and opinions cheap. Most of the magazine's articles were therefore based on interviews. In previous centuries, the conversation of notables found its way into the memoirs, journals, and correspondence of their contemporaries, but the notion of formal interviews was unknown. No one would have thought of interviewing Coleridge, for instance; people simply read his books.

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Arthur Clutton-Brock, one of the authors I first encountered in *The Oxford Book of English Prose,* distinguished poetry from prose in this way: "If the cardinal virtue of poetry is love, the cardinal virtue of prose is justice." Quiller-Couch offered an improvement upon this unquestionably worthy nineteenth-century definition: "I should prefer 'a high compelling emotion' to Mr. Clutton-Brock's 'Love,' however widely interpreted, as the virtue of Poetry; and Persuasion rather than Justice as the first virtue of Prose." Quiller-Couch's gloss certainly has a contemporary ring. He offered a further refinement of his definition, distinguishing literary prose from the words dashed off in a penny-a-liner: "The Newspaper Press admits to-day a portentous amount of that Jargon, or flaccid writing to which flaccid thought instinctively resorts. But literature, I repeat, is memorable speech, recording memorable thoughts and deeds."

The memorable speech that Quiller-Couch had in mind differs in many respects from the memorable speech we write and read today. Prose, like manners and dress, reflects its period, and our period is a democratic, Everyman's informational age, in which anything smacking of tradition, élitism, or pretension is suspect. When authors appear on television, we are apt to warm to them more readily if they wear sweaters and slacks than if they are formally clothed. Even language and dress distinctions between the sexes are blurring: men and women are both apt to be called *guys* and tend to favor similar clothes. In the 1950s, when I first started reading seriously, my contemporaries and I could usually surmise from a work's prose style whether its author was male or female, since there were consistent characteristics of style that we associated with one sex or the other. For instance, in those days everyone would have understood what was meant if one said the writer James Morris had a feminine style: namely, that his writing was lush, ornate, and finely embroidered. As it turned out, Morris himself felt that he had a female soul trapped in a male body, and in 1973 he underwent a sex change. (If one now looks up James Morris in the British *Who's Who,* the entry reads, "MORRIS, James; see Morris, Jan." Morris is perhaps the first writer to be entered under both a real male and a real female name.)

The dual nature of Morris's identity may have been a harbinger of new literary trends, in which the yin and yang of yesteryear merge into one uniform—or, rather, unisex—style. Today, if I read an article without noting the author's name, I often can't tell whether it was written by a man or a woman. Now that everyone is supposed to be like everyone else, and distinctions not only of sex but of degree and quality are blurred, any attempt at formal prose is hazardous. Indeed, most contemporary authors that I read nowadays, with a few exceptions such as John Updike, do not set their literary styles apart from conversational English. But this may not necessarily be a loss. Contemporary prose has an immediacy and

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a punchiness that reflect the fast-paced, technological character of our burgeoning mass culture.

It would be difficult for me to characterize my own style or to place it in any particular tradition. If in my writing I sometimes come across as a bolder person than I actually am, that is because, like other writers, I freely adopt a persona as a way of organizing and presenting my material. For the rest, I keep in the forefront of my mind something that Bertrand Russell once told me. He said that as a young man he wrote with difficulty—that he could recall having to revise his prose as many as ten times—and that he had developed his style by studying two models: Milton's prose and Baedeker's guidebooks. The Puritan never wrote without passion, he explained, and the cicerone used only a few words in recommending sights, hotels, and restaurants. Passion was the voice of reason, economy the signature of brilliance. Some forty years after I published my first book, I am still struggling with words and sentences, drafts and alterations, attempting, with as much passion and economy as I am capable of, to stick to my last as a lifetime apprentice of the craft.

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Mathematics Forty Years After *Sputnik*

SOLOMON W. GOLOMB

When I was a graduate student at Harvard in the early 1950s, the question of whether anything that was taught or studied in the mathmatics department had any practical applications could not even be asked, let alone discussed. This was not unique to Harvard. *Good* mathematics had to be *pure* mathematics, and by definition it was not permissible to talk about possible applications of pure mathematics.

This view was not invented by G. H. Hardy, the great British number theorist, but he was certainly one of its most eloquent and influential exponents. In *A Mathematician's Apology*, published in 1940, Hardy wrote, "Very little of mathematics is useful practically, and . . . that little is comparatively dull"; and "The 'real' mathematics of the 'real' mathematicians, the mathematics of Fermat and Euler and Gauss and Riemann, is almost wholly 'useless'"; and "We have concluded that the trivial mathematics is, on the whole, useful, and that the real mathematics, on the whole, is not."

To other number theorists, Hardy is best known for his collaborative work with J. E. Littlewood and with the Indian mathematical prodigy S. Ramanujan. He was well known for claiming that mathematicians did their real creative work by age thirty-five, and he dedicated his own later years to expository works in and about mathematics. The *Apology* was published when Hardy was sixty-three, seven years before his death.

In order to force external reality into the *Apology*'s rhetorical model, Hardy decided to include leading theoretical physicists in his canon of "real" mathematicians, but to justify this by saying that their work had no

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real utility anyway. Thus, he wrote, "I count Maxwell and Einstein, Eddington and Dirac, among 'real' mathematicians. The great modern achievements of applied mathematics have been in relativity and quantum mechanics, and these subjects are, at present at any rate, almost as 'useless' as the theory of numbers." He also asserted: "Only stellar astronomy and atomic physics deal with 'large' numbers, and they have very little more practical importance, as yet, than the most abstract pure mathematics." And, in a statement that must have had particular resonance in 1940: "There is one comforting conclusion which is easy for a real mathematician. Real mathematics has no effects on war. No one has yet discovered any warlike purpose to be served by the theory of numbers or relativity, and it seems very unlikely that anyone will do so for many years." Today, fifty years after Hardy's death, it seems incredible that a book so at odds with reality was so influential for so long.

It is ironic that Hardy's *Apology* was in fact not directed toward mathematicians at all. After the dreadful carnage of World War I, pacifism was widespread in England and effectively the established religion at Oxbridge between the wars. The extreme attempts to avoid antagonizing Hitler made by Stanley Baldwin and Neville Chamberlain, who between them occupied 10 Downing Street from 1935 to 1940, can only be understood in this context. It was primarily to the non-scientists at Oxford and Cambridge that Hardy wanted to proclaim the *harmlessness* of mathematics. Hardy indicated that the *Apology* was an elaboration of his inaugural lecture at Oxford, which he had delivered in 1920, when antiwar sentiment would have been particularly vehement, and that he was reasserting his position that "mathematics [is] harmless, in the sense in which, for example, chemistry plainly is not."

Chemistry, responsible for the poison gases and disfiguring explosives of the Great War, was Hardy's chief example of a "useful" science, closely followed by engineering, which is used for helpful things like building bridges, but also for destructive things like designing war planes and other munitions. Hardy was anxious to persuade his readership that "real" mathematics (especially the kind he did himself) is a noble aesthetic endeavor, akin to poetry, painting, and music, and has nothing in common with merely "useful" subjects like chemistry and engineering, which can be employed in the service of war. Barely two years later, after the blitz bombing of London, Hardy's pacifist audience in England would have almost completely disappeared; but as a mathematician's manifesto, his *Apology* carried a good deal of weight in mathematical circles for decades.

David Hilbert of Germany, who is regarded by many as the leading mathematician of the first four decades of the twentieth century, shared and advocated the view advanced in Hardy's *Apology*. Hilbert largely defined the agenda for twentieth-century mathematics with his famous list

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of twenty-three outstanding unsolved problems, presented at the International Congress of Mathematicians in Paris in 1900. The most clearly "applied" problem on Hilbert's list was the one that asked for a proper, rigorous mathematical formulation of the laws of physics. Coming just ahead of the discovery of relativity and quantum mechanics, this problem led to interesting mathematical work in directions Hilbert could not have anticipated, but in which he actually participated.

Another famous professor at Göttingen during the Hilbert epoch was Felix Klein, who had a much broader appreciation of applications. A reporter once asked Klein if it was true that there was a conflict between pure and applied mathematics. Klein replied that it was wrong to think of it as a conflict, that it was really a complementarity. Each contributed to the other. The reporter then visited Hilbert and told him, "Klein says there's no conflict between pure and applied mathematics."

"Yes," said Hilbert, "of course he's right. How could there possibly be a conflict? The two have absolutely nothing in common."

Through the ages, the very greatest mathematicians have always been interested in applications. That was certainly true of E. T. Bell's "three greatest mathematicians of all time": Archimedes, Newton, and Gauss. It was equally true of Euler, Lagrange, Laplace, and Fourier. Even in the first half of the twentieth century, it was true of Hermann Weyl, Norbert Wiener, and John von Neumann. As we come to the end of the twentieth century, the earlier insistence on the desired inapplicability of pure mathematics seems almost quaint, though one lingering legacy is that in certain circles the label "applied mathematics" retains a pejorative taint and an aura of non-respectability.

I want to examine the questions of when and how the concept of inviolable purity became entrenched in many departments of mathematics by the end of the nineteenth century and what has happened in the last forty years to weaken this presumption.

In the United States, the beginning of the modern research university dates back only to 1876, with the founding of Johns Hopkins, which was based on a German model no more than a few decades older. Before this period, the modern division of knowledge into departments and disciplines was much less rigid. In Newton's day, the term *natural philosophy* covered all the natural sciences. The chair that Gauss held at Göttingen was in astronomy. Only when there were separate, clearly defined departments of mathematics was it necessary to invent a rationale to defend their independence from either established or newly emerging fields that sought to *apply* mathematics. On the other hand, it was *not* necessary to justify the notion that every university *needed* a department of mathematics.

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From the time of Plato's Academy, all through the Middle Ages, and into the rise of post-medieval universities, mathematics had always been central to a good education. The traditional Scholastic curriculum consisted of two parts: the more elementary *trivium*, with its three language-related subjects—logic, grammar, and rhetoric; and the more advanced *quadrivium*, with its four mathematics-related subjects—geometry, astronomy, arithmetic (that is, number theory), and music (that is, harmonic relationships). At a time when Latin and Greek were indispensable parts of a university education, no one would have remotely considered eliminating mathematics because it was "impractical." Those students seeking a liberal university education, whether at Oxbridge or the Ivy League, were not supposed to concern themselves with learning a trade and earning a living. That came much later. And high-budget research, with the concomitant requirement to set funding priorities, was not yet a part of the university scene.

In the late nineteenth century, university mathematics departments thus had a firm franchise to exist and considerable latitude to define themselves. It was a time when much was happening in mathematics. The abstract approach was being applied, especially to algebra; the algebraic approach was being applied, especially to geometry and topology; analytic function theory was in full bloom; and a new standard of rigor had emerged. In many areas, mathematics was running so far ahead of applications that it was assumed that most of these fields would never have any. This was also true of certain classical areas, like number theory, which was developing rapidly as the beneficiary of new techniques from function theory and modern algebra and had no foreseeable applications. Rather than apologize for these fields' lack of applications, leading mathematicians and mathematics departments decided to turn a possible defect into a virtue. (In this, they anticipated a basic tenet of Madison Avenue: "If you can't fix it, feature it.")

In fact, the best mathematics consistently found very important applications, but often not until many decades later. When Riemann invented non-Euclidean differential geometry in the 1850s, it was assumed to be inapplicable, since no one then doubted that the physical universe we live in is Euclidean; but it became the mathematical basis for Einstein's general theory of relativity some sixty years later. Purely abstract concepts in group theory from around 1900 became central to the quantum mechanics of the 1930s and 1940s and to the particle physics of the 1950s onward. Finite fields, invented by Evariste Galois, who was killed in a duel in 1832 at the age of twenty, were once considered the purest of pure mathematics, but since 1950 they have become the basis for the design of error-correcting codes, which are now used indispensably in everything from computer data storage systems to deep-space communications to preserving the fidelity of music recorded on compact disks. George

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Boole's nineteenth-century invention of formal mathematical logic became the basis for electronic switching theory from 1940 onward and, in turn, for digital computer design.

Hardy's most precious area of inapplicable pure mathematics was prime number theory. Edmund Landau, in his 1927 work *Vorlesungen über Zahlentheorie* ("Lectures on Number Theory"), quoted one of his teachers as frequently remarking, "Number theory is useful because you can get a Ph.D. with it." Today, the most widely used technique for "public key cryptography" is the so-called RSA (Rivest, Shamir and Adleman) algorithm, which depends on several theorems in prime number theory, and on the observation that factoring a very large number into primes (especially if it is a product of only two big ones) is much harder than determining if an individual large number is prime.

In 1940, topology would have been high on most people's lists of inapplicable mathematics. Within topology, knot theory would have seemed particularly "useless." Yet today knot theory has extremely important applications in physics (for both quantum mechanics and superstring theory) and in molecular biology (for the knotted structures of both nucleic acids and proteins). The topology of surfaces is also much involved in superstring theory, including the structures that superstrings may take in multidimensional spaces. Even graph theory has blossomed into a major discipline in which the boundary between "pure" and "applied" is virtually invisible. Until recently, tiling problems were largely relegated to the domain of "recreational mathematics" (an obvious oxymoron to most non-mathematicians, but a pleonasm to true believers). Then, a decade or so ago, Roger Penrose's work on small sets of tiling shapes that can be used to tile the entire plane, but only if there is no precisely repeating finite pattern, was found to underlie the entire vast field of "quasicrystals."

I could give many, many more examples of how topics and results from the "purest" areas of mathematics have found important applications, but I believe I have made my point. It may still be necessary for some mathematics departments to defend themselves against being turned into short-term providers of assistance to other disciplines that are consumers rather than producers of mathematics. But most mathematicians now recognize the basic principle that good "pure" mathematics is almost certain to have major applications *eventually*. For most mathematicians today, the distinction that matters is between good mathematics and bad mathematics, not between pure mathematics and applied mathematics. To be fair to Hardy, this was the distinction he was trying to make in *A Mathematician's Apology*, when he differentiated real mathematics from trivial mathematics. Where he went off the deep end was in insisting that real mathematics is useless, and that useful mathematics is trivial.

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Like many of my generation, I was attracted to mathematics not by Hardy's *Apology*, but by E. T. Bell's *Men of Mathematics*, and my early interest in number theory was partly motivated by the accessibility of the subject. In most branches of "higher mathematics" the basic concepts are opaque to the outsider, but once they are understood, the questions that are easily asked are also easily answered. In contrast, the basic concepts in number theory (whole numbers, prime numbers, whether one number exactly divides another) are clear to almost everyone, but it is easy to ask "simple" questions that no expert can yet answer.

The first mathematics book I ever bought, with my own almost nonexistent disposable income during high school, was *The Theory of Numbers* by R. D. Carmichael. When I came to Harvard as a graduate student, I assumed that I would do a thesis in prime number theory. This was a respectable branch of mathematics at Harvard, although none of the faculty there specialized in it. David Widder, who recruited me to be his student on my very first day of classes, and who included an analytic proof of the prime number theorem in his book *The Laplace Transform*, was happy to sponsor my efforts. He had spent time as a post-doc of Hardy and Littlewood in Cambridge, where the highlight of his sojourn was sitting between these two famous gentlemen at a cricket match.

For actual help and inspiration, I drove to the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton one morning in October 1953, quite unannounced, and went to see Atle Selberg. I had discovered an interesting formula that I thought could be useful in analytic number theory. My formula looked similar to one that Selberg had used in his famous elementary proof of the prime number theorem. Selberg's first reaction was to think that my formula was false. Trying to disprove it, he convinced himself in the next ten minutes that it was true. He then spent the rest of the entire day with me, exploring ways I proposed to use this formula and making many helpful suggestions. I learned only later that Selberg had a reputation for being totally reserved and unapproachable.

The other number theorist who was very helpful was Paul Erdos, who was always totally approachable as long as you wanted to talk about mathematics. It was years later that I learned of the supposed feud between Selberg and Erdos. Later still, in November 1963, I saw them both in the same room at a number theory conference at Caltech. It was the day John Kennedy was assassinated. I remember the session chairman announcing the news flash that the President was dead. After no more than half a minute, the meeting resumed as before. I suspect it was the only activity in the country on that Friday afternoon that wasn't shut down. When I mentioned this long afterward to an insightful mathematician friend, I commented that the conference participants hadn't reacted to the news of Kennedy's death. "No, you don't understand," my friend told me. "They're mathematicians. That *was* their reaction."

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I could have finished up at Harvard in the spring of 1955, in time for my twenty-third birthday, but having been awarded a Fulbright fellowship for study in Norway, I decided to finish writing my thesis there. When I applied for the fellowship, I wasn't even sure who was still active in Norway. There were many famous Norwegian mathematicians, but I knew that Niels Henrik Abel, Sophus Lie, and Axel Thue were long dead, and that several others, including Oswald Veblen, Einar Hille, Øystein Ore, and of course Atle Selberg had resettled in the United States. From Landau's book I had learned about Viggo Brun's sieve method in prime number theory, but for all I knew Brun was also long dead. Fortunately, this was not the case. Brun turned seventy the month I arrived, in June of 1955, but he did not retire until a year later, and he lived well past ninety.

From Landau's austere *Satz, Beweis* ("Theorem, Proof") approach, I could prove Brun's theorem, that the series consisting of the reciprocals of the twin primes is either finite or convergent, but I had no understanding of what motivated it or why it worked. It was only when Brun explained his method to me that it made sense. I included a sieve-derived result in my thesis, which I also published in *Mathematica Scandinavica.* A few years later, Erdos got an improvement on my result, which he published in the *Australian Journal of Mathematics,* in a paper titled "On a Problem of S. Golomb." Mathematicians speak of anyone who has published a mathematics paper with the late Paul Erdos, the most prolific mathematician of the twentieth century, as having an "Erdos number" of *one.* If you have merely written a joint paper with someone who published with Erdos, then your Erdos number is *two;* if you have published with someone who published with someone who published with Erdos, your Erdos number is *three;* and so on. Dozens of people have published papers titled "On a Problem of Erdos," but since Erdos published a paper titled "On a Problem of S. Golomb," I claim that *my* "Erdos number" is *minus one.*

For four summers while I was a graduate student, I worked at the Martin Company, now part of Lockheed-Martin, and became quite interested in mathematical communication theory, including Claude Shannon's information theory, and especially shift register sequences, which were of interest for a variety of communications applications and whose behavior I found a way to predict, based on the "inapplicable" mathematics of finite fields. Shannon's epic paper, "A Mathematical Theory of Communication," was published in 1948, the year after Hardy died, but had Hardy had the chance to read it, he would surely have called it "real" mathematics, secure in the belief that it was not really useful. After all, Shannon merely proved that certain kinds of codes must exist; he gave no hint of how they could actually be found. But what has happened in the past fifty years is that outstanding mathematicians have worked closely with leading communications engineers to develop infor-

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mation theory and coding in a way that is simultaneously first-rate real mathematics and eminently useful engineering. In several prominent cases, the same remarkable individual has spanned the entire range from developing the theoretical mathematics to designing the practical hardware.

When I returned from Norway in the summer of 1956, I came to Southern California to work in the Communication Research Group at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena. This job, which grew out of the interest I had developed in mathematical communications during my summer jobs at the Martin Company, enabled me to continue my search for applications of "useless" mathematics to practical communications problems. Over the next seven years I formed and headed a group of outstanding young researchers who developed the systems that made it possible to communicate with space vehicles as far away as Neptune (three billion miles from Earth) and beyond. In 1956, NASA did not yet exist, and JPL was funded by the Ordnance Command of the U.S. Army.

The Ordnance Command also supported Wernher von Braun's group at Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville, Alabama. The U.S. Army was prepared to launch a small artificial satellite in September 1956, using a Redstone missile as the launch vehicle, and carrying a small JPL-built payload with a radio transmitter, but General John Bruce Medaris, head of the army ballistic missile agency, was unable to get the permission of the Eisenhower administration to proceed. Unaware that we were in any kind of race with the Soviet Union, the administration had decided that the U.S. space program should be peaceful, and therefore should not use an army missile as the launch vehicle. Instead, we had something called Project Vanguard under development, for which the launch vehicle would be a *navy* missile!

The Soviet Union's launch of *Sputnik I,* on October 4, 1957, took the world by surprise. It was visible to the naked eye in the night sky, and a fairly simple radio receiver could pick up its "beep-beep" signal. By around November 12, 1957, General Medaris not only had permission to launch a satellite using army vehicles; he had orders to proceed as quickly as possible. Meanwhile, on December 6, 1957, the first launch of a Vanguard satellite was attempted. As the world press corps watched, there was a spectacular explosion on the launch pad. The vehicle was consumed in flames from the bottom upward.

Eighty days after the authorization to proceed, the army satellite was ready for launch. The first stage was a liquid-fueled elongated Redstone rocket from Huntsville. The second stage was a cluster of eleven solid-fuel Sergeant missiles from JPL. The third stage used three Sergeant missiles from JPL. And the fourth stage, also built at JPL, was a cylinder

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about five feet long and eight inches in diameter, packed with electronic equipment and sitting atop a final Sergeant missile. This configuration had never been tested, but the launch of *Explorer I* on January 31, 1958, was a success on the very first try. I had a lab at JPL at that time, where I studied the properties of shift register sequences experimentally. During the weeks leading up to *Explorer I,* one of James Van Allen's graduate students was assembling a radiation detector in my lab, with the assistance of my technicians. It was this detector, flying on *Explorer I,* that "discovered" what came to be known as the Van Allen radiation belts around the Earth. My own special assignment was to participate in the "early orbit determination" of the satellite.

After *Explorer I* was launched from Cape Canaveral, no signal was picked up by the down-range station on the Caribbean island of Antigua. We did not know that the signal had been successfully detected and recorded at our stations in Nigeria and Singapore until a few days later, when we were notified by air mail! Amateur radio groups in Australia and Hawaii reported nothing. We were understandably worried that we had lost our satellite. We had three tracking stations widely spaced in Southern California, connected to JPL only by ordinary telephone lines. The nominal time for the satellite to come into radio contact over California came and went, with no detection by any of our stations. Three minutes passed, then another three minutes. Still no detection. There were many long faces in our orbit determination room at JPL. Then, about eight minutes late, all three of our tracking stations called in almost simultaneously. *Explorer I* was alive and well. One of the upper stages of the launch rocketry of *Explorer I* had over-performed, slightly enlarging the orbit and lengthening the period, and incidentally increasing the satellite's lifetime in orbit. What an exciting time it was to be at JPL!

While I was at JPL, I learned the real distinction between pure research and applied research. In 1959, the laboratory director, William H. Pickering, decided to form an ad hoc committee, with representatives from all over JPL, to report on the "research environment" and what could be done to improve it. He appointed me to chair it. I discovered that every member had strong opinions about what was pure research and what was applied research, and that, surprisingly, they absolutely had nothing to do with the subject matter. It all boiled down to this. What *you* want to work on is pure research. What *your boss* wants you to work on is applied research.

Sputnik shocked the American public. The realization that the Soviets were ahead of us in rocketry contradicted a basic tenet in Vannevar Bush's influential book *Modern Arms and Free Men,* which argued that a closed non-democratic society like the Soviet Union couldn't possibly develop armaments and advanced weapons as well as the U.S. could.

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Before World War II, Bush had developed a very early analog computer, called the Bush differential analyzer. During the war, he was Roosevelt's chief advisor on scientific and technological matters. He delivered the letter to FDR, drafted by Szilard and Wigner, and signed by Einstein, that led to the Manhattan Project and the atomic bomb. Beyond that, most of the things Vannevar Bush recommended—at least, the ones I am aware of—were ill advised. For example, because of his bias in favor of analog computing, he delayed research on digital computers until after the war. In *Modern Arms and Free Men*, he asserted not only that the Soviets couldn't possibly come up with first-rate weapons, but also that neither we nor they could ever develop intercontinental ballistic missiles. In 1957, I got a letter from Bush on his letterhead as chairman of the board of MIT. Martin Gardner had run an article in *Scientific American* about my "polyominoes" and included my proof that a particular covering of the checkerboard with pieces of a certain shape was impossible. This was shown by coloring the board in a particular way. Bush wanted to know why the result would still hold if you *didn't* color the board in that particular way! (If you prove a theorem in mathematics by the aid of added lines, or colors, or other constructs, the result remains true even when these are taken away, just as a building remains standing after the scaffolding is removed.) But perhaps I am too harsh on Bush. A newly published biography credits him with creating the post–World War II structure of government funding for university research, an achievement that puts many of us in his debt.

The extent to which we were behind the Soviets in the development of large missiles was mostly a political matter, and secondarily an engineering issue. Basic science was not really involved at all. Nonetheless, both the public and the politicians were convinced that a much greater commitment to the funding of research, especially university research, in all the basic sciences, including mathematics, was an urgent national priority. I believe it is very fortunate that this happened, and that it contributed significantly to our ability to win the cold war some thirty years later, but it had nothing to do with the issue of whether the U.S. was behind in rocketry.

As you will remember, Hardy had contended in *A Mathematician's Apology* that real mathematics is much more similar to poetry and painting than it is to chemistry or engineering. That is something that many of us, as mathematicians, might still like to believe; but the new government funding didn't extend to poetry and painting. The rationale for including mathematics in the largesse required a commitment to the principle that basic research in mathematics, like basic research in chemistry or engineering, will *ultimately* have significant consequences. Suddenly, there was a reason for trying to show that one's mathematics had practical uses and implications. This was not the only reason for the change in attitude

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about whether good mathematics could be useful, but it certainly played a part.

Another major influence has been the development of digital technology, which has placed new emphasis on areas of discrete mathematics that were previously considered inapplicable—for example, as I've mentioned, finite fields. Then there is computer science itself, which studies questions in pure mathematics, such as determining the computational complexity of various procedures, the results of which turn out to be extremely practical. Another development was Shannon's mathematical theory of communication, which asks questions that are motivated by applications but are more abstract mathematically than anything in physics. Shannon's "bit of information" is a purely mathematical concept. It has no mass, no spin, no charge, no momentum—and yet the issues involved in measuring information in bits, in storing information, and in moving information from one place to another are so important that we are told daily that we live in the Age of Information.

It is also true that science and engineering have changed dramatically in the fifty years since Hardy's death. Semiconductors and lasers make very nontrivial use of quantum mechanics, and the people who study them are not restricted to using what Hardy derisively referred to as "school mathematics." Today, many other fields, from molecular biology to control theory, also apply sophisticated mathematics.

In fairness to G. H. Hardy, there are many things in *A Mathematician's Apology* with which most mathematicians will agree or identify. Hardy asserted that mathematicians are attracted to the subject by its inner beauty rather than by any overwhelming desire to benefit humanity. Most mathematicians I know would agree with that. Even more important, Hardy identified himself as a realist (as the term is used in philosophy) about mathematics. "I will state my own position dogmatically," he wrote. " . . . I believe that mathematical reality lies outside us, that our function is to discover or observe it, and that the theorems which we prove, and which we describe grandiloquently as our 'creations,' are simply our notes of our observations. This view has been held, in one form or another, by many philosophers of high reputation from Plato onwards." The great majority of mathematicians share this view *about mathematics.* Where Plato went overboard was in trying to extend mathematical reality to physical reality.

Immanuel Kant explicitly distinguished between the transcendental reality of mathematics and the (ordinary) reality of the physical universe. My own version of this distinction is that if the Big Bang had gone slightly differently, or if we were able to spy on an entirely different universe, the laws of physics could be different from the ones we know, but 17 would still be a prime number. The Platonic (that is, realist) view of mathemat-

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ics has dissenters. Some who, in my opinion, are overly influenced by quantum mechanics would argue that 2^P-1, where P is some very large prime number, is neither prime nor composite, but rather in some intermediate "quantum state," until it is actually tested. Of course, the realist view is that it is already one or the other, and we find out which when we test it. Euclid gave a lovely proof—included in Hardy's *Apology* as an example of mathematical beauty that an educated non-mathematician could appreciate—that there is no largest prime number. That is, the sequence 2, 3, 5, 7, 11, . . . of the prime numbers is unending, or infinite. But Euclid's proof does not identify any specific large numbers as primes. It is particularly easy to test whether numbers of the form 2^P-1 are prime, and the largest specific number known to be prime at any time is likely to be one of these "Mersenne primes."

Even less palatable to most mathematicians is the postmodern criticism of all science: that it is just another human cultural activity, and that its results are no more absolute or inevitable than works of poetry, music, or literature. The extreme form of this viewpoint would assert that "4+7 = 11" is merely a cultural prejudice. I will readily concede the obvious: it requires a reasoning device like the human brain (or a digital computer) to perform the sequences of steps that we call mathematics. Also, culture can play an important role in determining which mathematical questions are asked and which mathematical topics are studied. (Our widespread use of the decimal system is undoubtedly related to the fact that we have ten fingers.) What I will not concede is that if the same mathematical questions are asked, the answers would come out inconsistently in another culture, on another planet, in another galaxy, or even in a different universe.

It was Isaac Newton who wrote, "I do not know what I may appear to the world; but to myself I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the seashore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great Ocean of Truth lay all undiscovered before me." It is hard to give a better formulation of the realist view of mathematical truth to which most mathematicians adhere.

Newton is firmly entrenched in the pantheons of both mathematics and physics. He certainly erected no artificial barriers between theory and applications. In the three centuries since he published the *Philosophiae naturalis principia mathematica* (the *Principia,* for short), we have, with electromagnetism and relativity and quantum mechanics, waded deeper into that Ocean of Truth; but Newton's laws of motion and gravitation were actually sufficient for the launching of *Sputnik* and *Explorer.* In the forty years that have elapsed since those satellites first circled the earth, most mathematicians—myself included—have moved further from Hardy's outlook and closer to Newton's.

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Shura and Shaya

An Afternoon with Sir Isaiah Berlin

NICHOLAS DAWIDOFF

My late grandfather, Alexander "Shura" Gerschenkron, the Russian-born economist, historian, linguist, translator, essayist, conversationalist, and "Harvard's scholarly model"—as *The New York Times* once referred to him—didn't feel close to many people. One exception was his dear friend Sir Isaiah "Shaya" Berlin, the Russian-born philosopher, intellectual historian, foreign servant, linguist, translator, essayist, conversationalist, *bon vivant*, and Oxford don. "Oh, they loved each other, those two!" my great aunt Lydia Gerschenkron Seward told me last summer at her home on the Isle of Wight. "They sparked each other. Shura would call him as soon as he got here and they'd speak in Russian. There was so much laughter when they were on the phone together." A fond, indulgent look came into her eye. "It was very sweet," she said.

On the same visit to England, I met Sir Isaiah myself. When he'd learned that I was at work on a biographical memoir of my grandfather, he wrote to me of his "very great admiration" for Shura and invited me to the Athenaeum Club on a late June afternoon to talk about him. Sir Isaiah was known as perhaps the most gifted British talker since Samuel Johnson, someone whose conversation mixed athletic breadth of learning—favorite topics were Machiavelli, Herzen,

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Turgenev, liberalism, class, villainy, and the opera—with enchanting wit, youthful enthusiasm, sly frissons, classical felicitations, and an always-fresh supply of very adult gossip. He dispensed it all, somebody once calculated, at the astonishing pace of four hundred words a minute. I couldn't help it. I was fifteen minutes (six thousand words) early to see him.

Founded in 1824 as a club for gentlemen practitioners and patrons of the arts, sciences, and literature, the Athenaeum owns a large, neoclassical clubhouse in London's Pall Mall, designed by Decimus Burton, the architect who drew up Hyde Park Corner. I gave my name at the door and was directed to a man seated across the foyer. At first glance, Sir Isaiah looked more like a hedgehog than like a fox. He was neither especially tall nor particularly bristly. His vested gray suit was as understated as the brown frames of his glasses. He held a cane. Sir Isaiah kept quiet as we rode in a creaking elevator; got out; walked slowly past a number of Max Beerbohm drawings; turned a corner; continued along a hallway lined with paintings of former Athenaeum members, including Charles Darwin, William Holman Hunt, Herbert Story-Maskelyne, and Herbert Spencer; and arrived at an exceptionally long drawing room whose glass-fronted cabinets held fine nineteenth-century editions of Horace, Socrates, Dante, Plato, and Virgil.

Only then did it suddenly become evident that even at eighty-eight, Sir Isaiah remained a sprightly man. Taking my arm, he bobbed rapidly past a great many men drinking Earl Grey tea (or something more potent), eating very red strawberries (or something more buttery), and reading the *Financial Times* (or something more Tory). He chose a small table, sat down, declined any refreshment, and began to speak.

Sir Isaiah and my grandfather were both known as formidable intellectuals who never wrote the "big book" that might have defined them for future generations. There are many reasons for this, but one is that both had such impatient minds that the idea of committing to a single subject for the many years it takes to produce a major work was anathema. Instead, they favored the preferred Johnsonian prose form, the essay, which allowed them to have their say without confining their roaming curiosity. Sir Isaiah's essays fill several volumes. One of those volumes, *Personal Impressions*, is a luminous series of sketches recalling his encounters with accomplished people. Among the signal qualities of these *éloges* is the writer's ability to create penetrating portraits of men and women he often had known only briefly, and not in any formal biographical context. Sir Isaiah had a way of lending his subjects something of himself, making them bigger than they were already. These glimpses of Winston Churchill, L. B. Namier, Boris Pasternak, Aldous Huxley, and the rest reveal Sir Isaiah, the famous talker, to be a

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magnificent listener and observer as well—the quickest study of them all, with a memory any elephant would cherish.

And that is exactly the spirit in which he now turned his mind to my grandfather, whom he first met in 1948, when both were associates at Harvard's Center for Russian Studies. Within minutes he'd speculated about my grandfather's ambivalence toward his father's religion, Judaism; recounted Shura's linguistic abilities ("He knew Swedish!"); intuited that Shura rarely welcomed intimate friendships; and remembered the Russia where they both grew up. Sir Isaiah's father was a timber merchant, first in Riga and later in St. Petersburg. My grandfather was the son of an Odessa factory manager. Both families fled during the Revolution. Sir Isaiah's family settled in England, my grandfather's in Vienna, where he lived for twenty years until the German Anschluss forced him to decamp again, this time for America. "Odessa had an extraordinary mixture of races and nationalities all rubbing against each other, like Vienna and, to some degree, like the United States," Sir Isaiah said. "Odessa was a very un-Russian Russian town. Doesn't mean you couldn't be Russian there. Your grandfather was. Fundamentally he was Russian. Culturally he was a Russian. But his home was not Russia, it was Russian literature."

This precipitated a brief consideration of the writers they both admired. My grandfather liked Tolstoy's *War and Peace* well enough to have read it at least eight times. Sir Isaiah felt much the same way. "It's the best novel ever written by a human being," he said. Then he was on to historians of Russia. First came Robert Conquest, who wrote about the Soviet purges, and next Franco Venturi, who took on Russian populism. "Your grandfather and I used to argue about the Soviet Union," Sir Isaiah said. "I said the only way of treating the Soviets was by *modus non vivendi*—by ignoring them and avoiding conflict with them. He didn't believe that it was possible to have a constructive relationship with the Soviet Union. 'No, no, no,' he'd say to me. '*Modus non vivendi* is simply *modus moriendi* [the way of dying]!'"

"'No, no, *no*,' I'd say. 'It means to live in the same world and avoid each other as much as possible—don't *provoke* each other.'"

His eyes twinkled. "'You're Marxed!' Shura used to accuse me," he said. "Shura was very non-Marxist, he was. Marxed! That's what Herzen called Marxists. Herzen loathed Communism and he particularly loathed Karl Marx. I was 100 percent anti-Communist all my life."

In the 1960s, Sir Isaiah invited my grandfather to be a fellow at All Souls College, Oxford, the fifteenth-century institution so rarefied in its devotion to scholarship that the only souls it welcomes are fellows—no students. Here was the picture of a place for men like these. "We chatted very frequently while he was there," Sir Isaiah said. "When I was ill in the hospital, he came to see me with a bottle of brandy and a

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book or two in German by Raimund, an Austrian dramatist of the 1820s and '30s. I don't read German very well. Maybe that's why he brought me that. He loved one-upmanship, he did. But I didn't compete with him. No competition between us."

Among the American literary acquaintances Sir Isaiah and my grandfather shared were the Harvard Shakespeare scholar Harry Levin, who married a Russian woman, and the critic Edmund Wilson. "I knew Harry Levin, but I didn't like him at all," Sir Isaiah said. "He was a narrow, pedantic, clever, envious man, too proud of his knowledge and his insights. I loved his wife. That may be why he didn't like me. Levin used to say unkind things about Edmund Wilson, who thought he was his friend, but I never told Wilson."

Wilson and my grandfather shared a distaste for the novelist Vladimir Nabokov's massive translation of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* and were delighted to lob punishing reviews in its direction. "[Nabokov] was furious about my piece," Wilson later chortled in a letter to my grandfather. "Like all people who play practical jokes and like to make other people ridiculous, he's always either aggrieved or indignant when anybody tries anything of the kind on him."

Sir Isaiah said he couldn't abide the translation either. "It was terrible! Just abominable!" he exclaimed. Then he yielded one of his famous torrents of observation. "Your grandfather probably thought Nabokov was artificial and conceited," he said. "Shura had a very clear view of life's values, what is good, what is bad, what is wrong, what is right. It was all very clear to him. I don't think he ever had dilemmas. He never was tormented. No 'Should I do this, or should I do that?' He always knew. What your grandfather believed in most was knowledge. Above all he believed in learning, scholarship, and culture. He liked ingenuity for its own sake and he liked cleverness. He was a very great defender of civilization."

Listening to Sir Isaiah talk about my grandfather felt much like standing out in a very nice warm spring rainstorm. As the words poured over me, I began to think he could just as well have been speaking of himself, something I suspect he recognized. For now he said, "I never read your grandfather's economics books. Not my subject. I was interested in philosophy, in the history of ideas, in the history of Russia, in radical ideas, in political theory, in music, in literature. Shura didn't mind. He was a jack of many trades and a master of many trades. He liked me for that reason." Then Sir Isaiah sprang to his feet, skirted the tables where pairs of clubmen were now working on egg-'n'-cress sandwiches, placed a fine hat firmly on his head, and hurried off into the evening.

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Eureka!

A Limey Geologist in Nevada

RICHARD FORTEY

Eureka, Nevada, has erected a notice near the town boundary informing the traveler that it is "the loneliest town on the loneliest road in North America." The claim may even be true. Eureka's nearest neighbors lie hours away along the sparse highways that cross the Great Basin, and, when you drive east from Reno along Route 50, it is something of a surprise to find any town at all in the middle of so much emptiness. When I first visited Eureka in 1972, the gold boom that had financed the ornate front of the saloon survived only in the memory of the town's oldest inhabitant. Only four hundred souls were left, and the debris of abandoned buildings lay scattered over the surrounding hills. People hadn't left in a hurry; they had just ambled away when the money ran out, and their houses had subsequently collapsed in an almost absentminded fashion. Still, a whiff of grandeur—however faint—persisted on Main Street. The wooden facades of several old shops displayed a kind of frayed dignity, like a grand lady who dressed in tattered finery in the expectation that great days might come again.

We stayed at a motel on the edge of town, a simple place where the air conditioning creaked and the rooms were dim and stale. I had been taken there by the irascible doyen of Nevada geology, Reuben James Ross, Jr., from the United States Geological Survey, with whom I was to do two weeks of fieldwork. Rube pointed out a dog that belonged to the place, a sort of degenerate hybrid boxer. The dog

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bounded up to you with a dented Coke can clutched in its jaws, dropped the can at your feet, and barked furiously while lolloping down on its front paws. You were clearly expected to throw the can, and when you did, the dog promptly fetched it back again and demanded you repeat the whole procedure. During one of its sallies, I noticed that its front teeth had been abraded by years of gnawing on the old tin can. "That darned dog was here the last time we came this way," said Rube, "and I swear that's the same can."

We ate at Jim and Lorraine's. I don't remember much choice in the matter. There was steak or steak on the menu, and the wise selection was steak. The beef was raised locally on the huge tracts of sagebrush country that stretched across the neighboring broad valleys, yielding hard rations to grazing animals. Sagebrush is tough and leathery—more stick than herb—but it has an ineffable fragrance when the dark leaves are crushed. There is precious little rain in these valleys, and precious little grass. Cattle must pick their way through the plain in search of a nibble here, a snack there, but somehow it all makes for tasty meat. I doubt whether a vegetarian would have found much succor in Eureka.

The name of the town derives, of course, from Archimedes' apocryphal cry upon the discovery of his Principle. It is one of the few words that demand a punctuation mark: Eureka! Like the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical *Oklahoma!*, it has a get-up-and-go about it, an intrinsic positivism. The cry is that of the first prospector who recognized that he would strike it rich: Look here! I've found it! Nevada is dotted with deserted sites where precious metals once incited that cry. In Silver City, the only silver now is in the hair of the prospectors too tired to move on. In a paradoxical way, Nevada has continued its lucky-strike tradition in that modern shrine to the exclamation point, Las Vegas. In the basement of the Luxor Hotel, the simulacrum of pharaonic gold still glisters, and one in a million visitors still utters the ecstatic "Eureka!" when a fortunate win transcends the merciless logic of the electronic tumblers. Sadly, the town of Eureka forfeited its exclamation point some time ago.

One of the curious benefits of being a geologist is that you get to go to places that others pass by. The geologist's map is not the map of the businessman, nor that of the farmer. Its landmarks are the sites where the rocks are interesting, where hidden truth may still be excavated—where there may even be a chance of a private "Eureka!" The geologist is at home in the wilderness, where blatant outcrops of rocks are most likely to reveal the hidden history of the land. He favors landscapes whose structural bones are exposed, for he is a time traveler accustomed to dealing in millions of years as others are to dealing in pork-belly futures or scrip issues.

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The Basin Ranges comprise a series of impressive mountains elevated in parallel ruckles, between which the basins form a series of virtually flat plains. The ranges are the place where old rocks come to the surface, like ancient memories revived. By contrast, the basins are mere geological yesterdays. The roads that cross this country speed straight across the sage-covered basins and then twist and turn erratically over the ranges. It is in the steep canyons and rocky slopes of the ranges that the geologist wanders, examining the testimony of rocks preserved for tens or even hundreds of millions of years.

A geologist's intimate knowledge of the places he travels through is probably more detailed than that of the farmer who works the same land. He can read the rocks as others would a diary. But the language of the rocks is an arcane one, requiring special translation skills. The truth of the past cannot simply be cracked like a code. Interpretations of ancient times depend on the observer and his prejudices, on which rocks he happens to have studied before, even on the school where he (more rarely she) acquired his doctorate. The meaning of rocks does not come to a convenient end like the narrative of a mystery story, because the rocks' mystery always reinvents itself just when a solution appears to be in sight.

Some geologists study mineral wealth, and such gold lovers would have good reason to linger in Eureka. But there is another kind of wealth as well, and its pursuit was what brought me halfway across the world to Jim and Lorraine's. Five hundred million years ago, the region that is now the Basin Ranges was underwater, and the record of its past has been preserved in the shells of the animals that once lived on the seafloor. Their fossils can be recovered by patiently breaking open the limestones and shales that crop out in the mountains around Eureka. Preeminent among the region's long-extinct marine animals are my own specialty, the trilobites.

Trilobites, distant relatives of lobsters and horseshoe crabs, flourished in the oceans of the Cambrian and Ordovician periods. There were thousands of different species, all now extinct, and it was my expertise in their recognition that first led me to stroll along Eureka's Main Street after a day of splitting rocks under the sun. (I have often reflected that a similar occupation is deemed hard labor for criminals.) Knowledge knows no political or geographical barriers. A limey is as qualified to study these fossil remains as a native of Silver City or Reno—in my case, probably rather better, as at that time there were no local experts younger than Rube. So my journey to Eureka was not just a voyage back to the domestic past of a town forgotten since its glory days—the days when its exclamation point was new—but an expedition more than a million times further back in time, to a past unknown to almost all those who passed the sign announcing the

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town's loneliness. Eureka's air of semi-ruin seemed appropriate to me, for the settlement was an intruder on a time infinitely more ancient. It was a frail craft that was drifting impertinently upon deep time.

To reach the rocks and the trilobites they contained, we had to drive along rutted tracks that tested the stamina of our four-wheel-drive Chevrolet Suburban. Then, continuing on foot, we climbed upward on tumbling scree slopes above the sagebrush. Ill-marked paths wound along the ridges. We scrambled past the trees of the high ground, tough conifers designed to sit out drought and cold. Most were piñon pines, whose nuts have provided nourishment to hundreds of generations of native peoples. In a few exposed places there were bristlecone pines, the slowest-growing and longest-lived organisms on earth. With their scrawny branches and meager green tufts, these strange trees looked close to death, but some of them had endured for centuries and would endure for centuries after we were gone.

The conifers' dense shade was welcome, for at this height we needed to rest out of the sun while we took a swig from the water bottle and got our breath back. The wind in the trees made a sibilant rustle. There were occasional rattlesnakes here, too, but the clump, clump of our boots was usually enough to send them slinking away into crevices. It seems a strange notion, climbing *upward* to the past, but in this land the deepest rocks have often been elevated by earth movements to form the highest ground. When we gained the summit at last, we looked away over the broad valleys. No man-made debris offended our view. From that vantage point, it was not so difficult to imagine the landscape bathed in a shallow, tropical sea: a limy ooze might stick to your toes, and the scuttling legs of trilobites might briefly tickle your shins as they sought to escape. This was time so distant that even the bristlecone pines seemed like upstarts.

Some of the fragments of trilobites that my geological hammer wrested from the tough rocks turned out to be old friends. To discover them here did not quite provoke a shout of "Eureka!" It was more like the agreeable surprise experienced when a familiar face suddenly appears in an unfamiliar city: What brings *you* here? I had studied these animals while working for my doctorate at Cambridge. I knew every facet of their stony eyes. I had written three hundred pages of dense scholarship on their affinities and significance. With a pin I had dug them out of limestones that I had collected five years before, in the high Arctic. I had inspected their like in volumes published by the Estonian Academy of Sciences, by the University of Uppsala, and by the Peabody Museum at Yale. I had discussed them with world authorities. I was *steeped* in trilobites. It was quite a paradox that I was more familiar with these ancient fossils than with the ways of Eureka's inhabitants.

I know that I was, in my own way, as strange a creature in this

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landscape as a trilobite: a laconic Englishman, more Carnaby Street than Carson City, dressed in effete jeans and a purple T-shirt. I believe that in my naïveté I may even have approached one of the cowhands in Jim and Lorraine's and said "Howdy." But any word I uttered revealed my origins just as surely as if I had said "Toodle-pip, old boy!" No wonder Rube was frequently inclined to mumble under his breath, "Goddam limeys!" I was moved to remind him that the word *limey* was derived from the lime juice of which British sailors habitually partook as a prophylactic against scurvy, and I remarked on what a strange thing it was that here, hundreds of miles from the sea (but on the site of an ancient one), the term should still have such currency. No wonder I got funny looks.

I came to Eureka shortly after I joined the staff of the Natural History Museum in London, a mark of distinction that, naturally enough, did not mean much to Jim and Lorraine. The museum had asked me to collect some hand specimens for reference, although there was insufficient time then for me to initiate a research program based on them. When I returned to London, I carefully labeled the fruits of my fieldwork and placed them in drawers in the vaults of the museum, where they could be located for future study. Curation imparts a kind of formal dignity to specimens that divorces them from their origins. The other day I looked up one of the specimens I had found twenty-five years ago. It seemed to have little about it that recalled the fragrant air beneath the piñon pines. Future researchers looking at these fragments of long-extinct trilobites would never know about the view from the hilltop, nor the long climb up from the parked Suburban, nor yet the mumbled imprecations against those who sucked the juice of the lime. The evaporation of these associations touched me with sadness.

Some years after my first trip, I returned to Eureka with my wife. She was expecting our first child at the time, and was a little bemused by my insistence that we drive continuously for two days from California to this most obscure of places. I was a little bemused myself. Nonetheless, I felt that Eureka had to be checked out. Nothing much had changed. Having heard that Rube Ross was doing fieldwork in the area, I had made a rather vague arrangement to meet him in the motel at the edge of town. And there he was, a little more weatherbeaten—he is one of those people who shrink, rather than expand, with age, and thereby acquire the concentrated durability of a prune—and just as irascible. Another member of the United States Geological Survey was there, too, bleary from long weeks of fieldwork, and I felt something of an intruder. I was just about to regale them nostalgically with the story of the dog—when it appeared. Wheezing with effort, it tottered out of

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the shade, holding in its mouth a battered can that might, possibly, once have held Coca-Cola. It dropped the can and gasped expectantly, waiting for it to be thrown. The poor old dog's teeth had been reduced to little stubs.

On this occasion we didn't stay long.

I believed that I would never see Eureka again, but I was wrong. In 1990, I was invited to do some serious work on the same rocks that I had examined for the first time in 1972. The National Geographic Society (to whom many geologists have given thanks) offered to put up enough money to buy gas and food. On my first expedition, a number of questions had suggested themselves during my evening discussions with Rube, and through all of those intervening years, those questions had lain dormant—more like seeds than fossils—in the back of my mind. Rocks, of course, do not change or go away, so you can pick up where you left off. I wanted to sort out the ages of some of the Ordovician strata, which seemed to me to have been wrongly appraised by those who had worked there before. Fossils provide a unique chronology, as definitive in its way as a quartz watch. You just sit there on the rock outcrop tapping away at the rocks layer by layer, carefully recording what fossils you have found and exactly where they came from. Most of the time, this is more a matter of doggedness and persistence than a matter of "Eureka!" but once in a while a lucky break will reveal something important—a rare fossil that proves you right—and it's enough to make you whistle through your teeth, if not actually dance a jig.

As it happened, the particular and unique species of trilobites I recovered in 1990 showed that a small time interval represented in the Nevada rock sections had been missed before. A page of ancient history was thus revealed for the first time. Like so much academic work, this is not the stuff of Nobel Prizes; it is just a small draught added to the vat of knowledge. But without the accumulation of these modest discoveries, the grand narrative of the history of the Earth could never be compiled.

This time I was working with a different and younger crew. Mary Droser from the University of California at Riverside was in charge. Mary had done her dissertation in the Great Basin and had no fears of remoteness. She had sufficient confidence in vehicles and maps to drive up the most obscure canyons with the expectation that we would both come out again, and indeed we usually did. Sometimes we camped out under the stars and ate chili dogs for supper and drank beer from the cooler. On other occasions, the attraction of showers and steaks bade us drive for an hour or so to the nearest town. Sooner or later that nearest town was Eureka.

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The old facades were still there. Some of the buildings had been given a lick of paint. There was a renovated and rather smart motel in the middle of town. There were newish tourist shops cashing in on the town's frontier aura. Indeed, now that I looked at it afresh, Main Street did resemble the set of one of the B movies that had occupied my Saturday afternoons as a child: the kind of place where a shoot-out might follow a disagreement in the saloon. Still, I doubted whether enough tourists made it this far to afford the shopkeepers a decent living. The county courthouse was unquestionably a source of regular employment, but otherwise the town was, as they were wont to say in those B movies, "Quiet. Too quiet."

I made further inquiries. Jim and Lorraine, I learned, had split up. Lorraine had run off with a pickle manufacturer from Milwaukee. After their joint changed hands, the social center of town had moved across the road to the saloon, a crepuscular establishment whose only illumination was provided by electronic gambling machines. Behind the bar was Scarlett, a barmaid with whom it would be unwise to tangle. The evening we were there, the employees of the cathouse on the edge of town were having an evening to themselves. Sheepherders of uncompromising toughness were leaving, ashen-faced, by the back door. As everyone knows, prostitution is legal in Nevada, and virtually every town boasts a brothel. Eureka was hardly the place where the most successful members of the profession would fetch up, and the sight of the ladies *en masse* was intimidating. At the bar, a catatonic cowhand was grasping an empty glass and dimly taking in the scene. "Scarlett!" he called out, "I'm a-soberin' up—and I don't like it!"

I left the bar and rattled off along the wooden sidewalk. The changes I had found in Eureka did not sit well. I suppose that I had hoped this remote town would be immune to change, and that by revisiting it I could somehow reverse the chronology of my own life—that I could become once more the enthusiastic, fresh-faced limey who had looked with such wonder over the sagebrush valleys. But there is no such thing as a timeless place. Even in the loneliest town on the loneliest road in North America, the laws of economics and of human frailty follow their own logic. People run away with pickle manufacturers, gas stations open, drugstores close. Only the rocks themselves are immutable. This is a fact that a geologist ought to know in his bones, but it took me three visits to Eureka to understand it. Nonetheless, at the end of my walk I found myself outside the motel on the edge of town, which was more run-down than ever. Something irrational in me still wanted to see an old dog run out with a can in its mouth, waiting and waiting for a ritual that never changed.

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Mud Season

RACHEL HADAS

Alone in a white room,
and then to venture out.
Late winter. Watery glow
of melt and shining thaw
a second source of light.
Days lengthening. Me too.
Do not say young or old.
Do not say early, late.
Say that the ice is thin,
say that winter's cold
is giving way to spring,
so you can hear the voice
of reawakened water.
The month is winding down
and strips of snow are shining
underneath the moon,
except there is no snow.
The winter sheen is gone.
Beasts sleeping, curved brown backs:
the little hills are bare.
Pools give back the sky
and sky fills our boot tracks
so that we walk on air.

Rachel Hadas's *Halfway Down the Hall: New and Selected Poems* will be published by Wesleyan University Press in the fall of 1998. She has won a Guggenheim Fellowship in Poetry and an Award in Literature from the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

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Mad Cow Mysteries

HARRIET RITVO

Two years ago, when mad cow disease arrived in the British headlines to stay, not everyone was shocked. Faithful listeners to *Farming Today,* which airs just after six o'clock every morning on BBC Radio 4, already understood that the spread of mad cow disease might lead to a variety of terrible consequences, human illness among them. Anyone seriously concerned with British cattle—or, indeed, anyone who had paid cumulative attention to the intermittent but increasingly troublesome reportage of the previous decade—would have developed a good deal of apprehension on the subject. As a cultural historian who is particularly interested in domesticated animals, spends a good deal of time in British libraries, and listens to *Farming Today,* I belong to both these audiences; so I was dismayed but not surprised when, in March 1996, the British government dramatically abandoned its previous reassuring line and admitted that whatever was making the cattle stagger and collapse might possibly be transmitted to humans—with similarly fatal effects.

Less bovine-oriented consumers of news had apparently not been so attentive. The immediate response to this reversal of official doctrine indicated that much of Britain's population and many of its trading partners had not been prepared for its most alarming implications. Many nations, including New Zealand, Egypt, South Korea, and South Africa, as well as Britain's fellow members of the European Union, suspended the importation of British beef. At home, consumers expressed their concern with their feet, leaving steaks and joints to languish on the shelves of supermarkets and butcher shops. McDonald's restaurants in

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the United Kingdom quickly announced that their burgers would henceforward be innocent of native beef.

The decisiveness of this reaction (as well as the complacence that had preceded it) could be interpreted as testimony to the influence and credibility of the British government. But a more modest and more complicated assessment would probably be nearer the mark. After all, the official announcement hardly signaled a novel source of concern. Even during the decade of public denial, mad cow disease (technically known as bovine spongiform encephalopathy, or BSE for short, because it afflicted cattle by causing their brains to become spongy) had lurked on the fringes of British consciousness. The possibility that it might pose a threat to the health of beef-eating people had been recognized, at least in theory, from the initial observation of its alarming symptoms, even if no one knew what was making the cattle sick or how they had been exposed to the unknown agent. This baseline anxiety was intermittently intensified by reports that the BSE agent seemed to be able to jump species. In 1990, for example, the disease was identified in kudu, oryx, eland, nyala, and gemsbok (all antelopes, which are closely related to cattle), as well as in the domestic cat (a carnivore, and therefore only remotely related to cattle). Further, mad cow disease was recognized as belonging to a group of lethal neurological diseases—spongiform encephalopathies—that included scrapie (a common affliction of sheep), kuru (common only among a small group of New Guinean people), and CJD or Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (extremely rare but widely distributed among human populations). Speculation arose that the BSE agent might also cause a newly identified variant of CJD, which affected younger people and took longer to run its fatal course. In 1993 the *Lancet* suggested that the death of a farmer from CJD had been caused by an occupational hazard: contact with his BSE-infected herd.

Responses to these inconclusive but troublesome suggestions varied. Australia and the United States banned the importation of British beef and cattle in 1989. Several European countries followed suit in 1990 but quickly reversed their decision after reassurances from the British government. On the whole, however, such reassurances were not required. Even at home, where BSE-related items appeared most frequently in the news, and where consumption of British cattle products, and therefore exposure to anything harmful that they might contain, was highest, the disease was routinely trivialized. The flurries of alarm that greeted each new revelation tended to die down quickly, although they sometimes left added precautions in their wake, and they inevitably contributed to a latent sense of unease. Tory politicians (the Conservative party was in power throughout this period) tended to view mad cow disease through the eyes of the beef industry, as a potential economic catastrophe rather than as a threat to public health. They instituted regulations reluctantly

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and implemented them without conviction. They repeatedly downplayed the possibility of transmission to humans, most flamboyantly in 1990 when Minister of Agriculture John Gummer, for the edification of the public, confidently fed his four-year-old daughter a hamburger. (Because they included beef products of varied derivation, fast-food burgers attracted special suspicion.)

Gummer's lighthearted attitude was widely shared by both journalists and the larger public. The first cat to die of BSE was headlined as "Mad Moggy." One of the many Web sites devoted to mad cow disease featured a pasture full of loopy cartoon cattle, with revolving pinwheels for eyes. And, although the beef coolers at my local Sainsbury's were completely empty only a few days after the official bombshell of March 1996, the first explanation that occurred to me turned out to be completely wrong. I guessed that the unpurchased meat had spoiled and been returned whence it had come. But instead, in response to shoppers' initial shocked avoidance, Sainsbury's (along with the other large supermarket chains) had simply cut beef prices in half. Many customers eagerly stocked their freezers with meat that had seemed too dangerous at regular rates.

British beef consumption soon returned nearly to pre-scare levels, perhaps encouraged by official measures and explanations (including the removal of cattle more than thirty months old from the food chain, the exclusion of meat and bonemeal from feed destined for farm animals, and the assurance that the heads of slaughtered cattle would join their spinal cords and other organs suspected of concentrating the BSE agent as "specified bovine offal" that could not be unrecognizably reprocessed into other food products). The response, however, was varied—among non-vegetarians of my acquaintance, some totally avoided beef, some avoided ground beef, some were skeptical, and some were fatalistically indifferent. But, in any case, the sense of renewed security enjoyed by some British beefeaters ended at the beaches. The European Union imposed a ban on the export of British beef and beef products, not only to other member nations, but throughout the world. As I write in early 1998, this ban is still in place, although under the newly elected Labour government, as under the old Conservatives, the British Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Food has made repeated and energetic attempts to have it rescinded. Despite the defensive efforts of their governments, continental consumers have proved less easily mollified than their insular counterparts. Like British consumers, they conceived an instant aversion to beef after the announcement of March 1996, but unlike the British, they did not change their minds—despite the embargo on British beef, the very small number of cases of mad cow disease that had been reported in continental herds, and the fact that local beef was prominently labeled, with words and even with flags. They have resisted both official

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blandishments and those of their beef industries, and beef consumption has remained far below pre-1996 levels.

It is interesting that governments and citizens on either side of the English Channel reacted so differently. Of course, official responses were heavily influenced by economic self-interest: the British desire to preserve the international markets for their beef and beef products, and the somewhat incompatible desire of other European Union members to avoid having their own beef industries tarred with the brush of British BSE. But cattle farmers and meat processors, and the food industry more generally, were not the only groups with a potential stake in BSE policy, although they were by far the best organized ones. If mad cow disease was transmissible to other species, including humans, then the general public had an interest in its control and elimination that transcended the merely financial. Once the possibility of transmission was seriously acknowledged, governments were self-consciously setting policies with potentially enormous public health consequences, and individuals were making, on their own behalf and that of their children, what might literally prove to be life-and-death decisions. Not even the Conservative government, with its bottom-line and value-for-money orientation, conceived its mission so narrowly as to exclude this kind of unquantifiable moral responsibility. It would not have been able (or inclined) to defend a policy that demonstrably sacrificed the health of large numbers of citizens in an attempt to maintain the profits of an industry.

But it is not necessary to posit any such sinister calculation to account for British policy. One reason that so many inconsistent courses of action seemed possible in March 1996 was that decision making was relatively unconstrained by information. The answer to the most important question—whether mad cow disease posed a significant threat to human health—was, and remains, unclear, although the indications have become increasingly troubling, as the number of human cases slowly accumulates and the relationship between BSE and the new variant of Creutzfeldt-Jakob demonstrably strengthens. Even the basic facts of the mad cow epidemic were and are subject to wide interpretation. For example, between its first official recognition in 1986 and the spring of 1997, 168,382 diseased cattle were identified in the United Kingdom, a figure of impressive but possibly misleading precision. The equivalent figure for non-British BSE underlines the problems implicit in such quantifications. Approximately 400 cases have been reported in other European nations, mostly in Switzerland. This number is surprisingly small when it is considered that, before 1990, thousands of British cattle, along with large quantities of beef, bonemeal, and other cattle products, were regularly imported by those nations. It has been plausibly suggested, especially but not exclusively by politicians protesting the ban on

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British beef, that European incidence of the disease has been seriously underreported, as a consequence both of draconian sanctions, such as the destruction of any herd in which a single case appears, and of the inadequate compensation paid to the unfortunate farmer who owns it. This was the reverse of what was intended, but, given human nature, predictable enough.

Within the United Kingdom, the pattern of infection was equally puzzling, if better documented. Mad cow disease was more prevalent in dairy herds than among beef cattle, more common in England than in Scotland. Some herds, even in areas where it was prevalent, remained untouched. Epidemiological analysis of the first rash of cases identified commercial feed that incorporated meat and other material from sheep, and possibly also from cattle, as the only factor that linked all the outbreaks. It was theorized that the cattle had ingested the BSE agent as they munched the remains of their ruminant brothers and sisters—possibly transmogrified from scrapie-infected sheep, possibly simply transmitted from an already afflicted cow or bull. (As with the AIDS epidemic, which seemed at first to have come from nowhere, retrospective reflection revealed possible earlier cases, suggesting that the disease might previously have been endemic at a very low level.) The feed hypothesis was plausible, and it has provided the basis of the most effective disease-control measures. Indeed, the elimination of meat and meat by-products from livestock feed is largely responsible for the dramatic drop in BSE cases in recent years (a drop that had begun before the scare of March 1996); it is possible that within a few years, due to this measure alone, mad cow disease will have been eliminated from British herds. But if contaminated feed was the cause, why was its effect lethal in some cases and innocuous in others? Given the protracted incubation period of BSE, longer than the lifetime of many beef cattle, could absence of disease be reliably taken to indicate absence of infection? And what of other associations, less powerful but still suggestive, especially exposure to certain organophosphorus compounds used in agriculture?

Another set of questions clustered around the elusive agent. The language of epidemics and transmission in which mad cow disease was normally discussed suggested infection, rather than poisoning, although clearly this was no ordinary contagion. Gradually, a scientific consensus emerged that, in the case of BSE, as with the other spongiform encephalopathies, the agent was a distorted prion, a kind of protein molecule found in the brain. (The apparent strength of this consensus was enhanced last year when Stanley Prusiner, the controversial theorist of prions, won the Nobel Prize in biology.) But although this focus on prions clarified further directions for research, it did nothing to simplify the task of formulating practical responses. For example, it did not explain how animals became infected with mad cow disease. New cases kept

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appearing after the suspect feed was banned, and only some of these cases could be attributed to farmers thriftily ignoring public health regulations in order to use up feed that they had already paid for. Could it be transmitted from animal to animal within a herd? From mother to calf? (In the latter case, the ban on beef from animals more than thirty months old was beside the point.) Could the infective agent somehow linger in fields where sick animals had been pastured, as was the case with scrapie?

Indeed, because prions were not well understood, and because they turned out to be practically indestructible (in particular, enormously resistant to heat), their implication in the spread of the disease significantly complicated one facet of policy making. Although the elimination of BSE in cattle offered the obvious ultimate solution to the problem, in the interim it was necessary to protect members of other species, especially humans, from contact with potentially infective material. Removing all cattle from herds with any BSE cases from the food chain, and removing the brain, vertebral column, and other suspect organs from all butchered cattle were only the first steps. Assuming it was successfully accomplished (an assumption not always justified), this triage yielded an immense volume of rejected offal and carcasses. The unsavory material then had to be disposed of in a sterile or sanitary way, so that the distorted prions did not re-enter the food chain or, worse, were not somehow more widely disseminated. Burying was clearly out of the question, as was disposal in coastal waters, where marine mammals might be exposed and where neighboring countries might object. Cremation at unusually high temperatures seemed like the only practicable solution, but not all incinerators were properly equipped for such procedures. If infected material was inadequately burnt, prions might survive in the smoke and be scattered by the wind, ultimately to settle in soil or in water, ready for re-ingestion. Developing adequate capacity and procedures for this massive slaughtering and incineration has proved unexpectedly challenging. In the meantime, contaminated carcasses and offal have accumulated in storage.

The toughness of prions also complicated decisions about which beef products posed a risk of transmitting mad cow disease. Although dairy products were generally pronounced safe, opinions varied about gelatin, a substance present in a wide variety of prepared foods, including some, such as packaged cookies or biscuits, routinely eaten by unwary vegetarians. Gelatin is much more heavily processed than milk or cheese, but it includes boiled-down material from suspect cattle parts. In April 1996, a government regulation prohibited the use not only of meat but also of bonemeal as fertilizer on agricultural land, although use in private gardens and in greenhouses was still permitted. (Prudent gardeners, however, were advised to wear gloves and masks.) And the identification of

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prions as the BSE agent did nothing to allay concerns about their possible cross-species transmission during the previous decade, perhaps (again in analogy to AIDS) seeding a devastating human epidemic, the scale of which would not become obvious for years or decades. In the nightmare scenario delineated by Richard Rhodes in *Deadly Feasts: Tracking the Secrets of a Terrifying New Plague*, the rogue prions have already become so widely disseminated that stopping their further destructive spread will be nearly impossible.

The official announcement of March 1996 did not tilt the odds—or change the reality, whatever it turns out to be—in one direction or the other. But, by altering public awareness, it produced a need for governmental action, both in Britain and in other countries. And if information is not available (indeed, often, even if it is), policies must be formulated on other grounds. This is not to suggest that ignorance was foregrounded as the basis of official decision making. On the contrary, one of the most striking features of the Conservative government's attempt to defend the lighthearted negligence of its previous treatment of the BSE issue was the repeated invocation of "scientific advice" as the touchstone of its policy. Although the specific content of this advice was seldom alluded to, ministers and government spokesmen referred to it as definitive and authoritative—the quintessential black box—at a time when most scientists concerned with BSE were emphasizing the prevalence of uncertainty. (The relevant expert community in Britain was in any case smaller than it might have been, as a result of earlier official reluctance to fund research that might produce disturbing results.) And the government was aided in this misrepresentation by the fact that, with some notable exceptions such as the *New Scientist*, science journalism is underdeveloped in Britain, as is the popular audience for such reportage.

Although the government proclaimed its policy was based on "scientific advice," it was more transparently founded on patriotism, which had the advantage of immediate public appeal. From this perspective, the interests of the nation, its citizens, and its cattle industry were happily indistinguishable from each other and from those of the animals themselves. Editorial cartoons portrayed a blighted countryside, heavily shadowed by smoke from a holocaust of innocent cattle—a sad contrast with the beautiful placid herds to be seen throughout rural Britain, and one that ignored the similarity between BSE-induced culling and ordinary slaughtering from the bovine point of view. Those inclined to continue or to resume their previous dietary preferences could see eating British beef as a declaration of loyalty, even as an assertion of national courage and common sense against the scaremongering of experts and foreigners. Soon after the announcement of March 1996, I went to a Chinese restaurant in Cambridge with a group of people, some of whom, in this

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enthusiastic spirit, made a point of ordering beef dishes to be shared. They also made a point of noticing who declined to share them.

Simple jingoism, however, does not sufficiently explain the widespread willingness to ignore a risk that, although it might well not exist at all, might also lead to the most dreadful consequences. Food contamination alarms are not routinely viewed with indifference by the British public. For example, a 1988 uproar about salmonella in eggs was countered by the heavily publicized consumption of a runny omelette by the prime minister herself. Further, the British tend not to regulate their everyday behavior according to knee-jerk patriotism (certainly, they are less inclined to do so than are Americans); and the word of the superannuated Tory government had long ceased to inspire implicit confidence, as was confirmed by its decisive defeat at the polls the following year.

Beef, and the cattle that produce it, holds a special place in British national mythology. Before John Bull was a canine he was a bovine. The wealthy eighteenth-century landowners who devoted themselves to agriculture took special pride in the creation of improved breeds of livestock, such as the shorthorn cattle that remained internationally preeminent for the succeeding century. In this enterprise, the breeders celebrated themselves. It was no accident that the entries in studbooks, herd books, and flock books closely resembled those in Burke's and Debrett's catalogues of the aristocracy and gentry. But the breeders also claimed to represent the entire nation at its best, a claim that many ordinary citizens accepted without demur. Many were eager to pay homage to the breeders' magnificent beasts when they were exhibited at national livestock shows by, as one agricultural journalist put it, "closely inspecting, admiring, and tormenting the bullocks sent by Dukes and Earls." The public apparently agreed with Julius Caesar, who had suggested that cattle constituted the true wealth of the Britons, and with an early president of the Royal Agricultural Society, who discerned "in the people of this country a peculiar disposition and talent for encouraging the finest animal forms."

The sustenance derived by such people from such cattle was inevitably profound and complex. The roast beef of Old England has for centuries been valued as much more than an efficient source of nourishment. To it was attributed, at least in part, the superiority of the British soldier to his European and imperial antagonists; more generally it has been viewed by observers within the British polity and outside it as an essential component of the national character. As Charles Dickens reflected more than a century ago in *Household Words*, "beef is a great connecting link and bond of better feeling between the great classes of the commonwealth," inspiring respect second only to "the Habeas Corpus and the Freedom of the Press." Further, British naturalists and agricultural experts, chefs and

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gourmets have tended to agree about their nation's preeminence with regard to the quality of the meat it produces, as well as the quantity it consumes. For example, a Victorian gastronomer celebrated native beef while disparaging native cuisine and foreign livestock: "If the poor, half-fed meats of France, were dressed as our cooks . . . dress our well-fed, excellent meats, they would be absolutely uneatable." As a result, a deeply ingrained tradition of metonymic identification has developed, affectionately acknowledged when the British call themselves "beefeaters," less affectionately when their nearest continental neighbors call them "rosbifs."

In any country, the possible condemnation of the national cattle herd would be viewed as an impending disaster, both economic and epidemiological, even if it was not associated with a potentially serious threat to human health. But the time-honored identification of Britain with its beef has made the BSE crisis especially difficult. And the resonance of this patriotic symbolism has not been exclusively domestic. It seems likely that the intransigence with which Britain's trading partners in the European Union have defended their import bans, once imposed, as well as the obsessive avoidance of beef by many European consumers also reflect historic associations and aversions.

At present, the story of mad cow disease is far from over. Even as the number of bovine BSE cases continues to tumble, and the very small number of human CJD cases fails to rise, new prophylactic measures continue to be imposed. In response to scientific evidence that the BSE agent could be carried by nerve tissue near the spinal cord, the Labour government banned the sale of beef on the bone just before Christmas. The ban has been unduly flouted by both butchers and eaters; a Scottish hotelier who organized a ballyhooed "prohibition dinner" in December is scheduled for trial in March. And the quest for answers goes on, in the hearing room as well as in the laboratory. An official team has recently been appointed to inquire into the political, economic, and administrative causes of the decade-long catastrophe. Their report is due next December.

Despite all this questioning, few answers have yet emerged. None of the projected scenarios, from the most reassuring to the most alarming, has been definitively eliminated, either in the laboratory or through epidemiological study. Sooner or later, however, the medical and veterinary cases will be closed, and it will be possible to determine who was prudent, who was alarmist, who was foolhardy. But for several reasons such a restricted accounting should not constitute the final word on BSE. Although mad cow disease happened to strike British herds, it does not seem to have resulted from idiosyncratically British attitudes or practices. Large-scale livestock farming is similar throughout the world, as are the relations between major industries and their national governments. At

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first glance the reactions of European governments seemed to compare favorably with that of their British colleagues, as they made the health of their citizens their first priority. But when the potential danger to health came from their domestic beef industries rather than from the foreign menace, their inclination was generally similar to that of the Tories. The same point could be made with regard to the United States, which has stalwartly maintained its early ban on British beef products. Officially, according to the Department of Agriculture, we have no BSE—but the Department also goes to the trouble of denying that downer cow syndrome, which afflicts thousands of American cattle each year, is related to mad cow disease. As Oprah Winfrey's recent legal troubles demonstrate, not everyone is persuaded by this denial.

The shared inadequacy of these responses points to a larger problem that is also shared: the difficulty of dealing with complex technical crises. Such crises by definition require the attention of experts—experts that strapped or stingy governments probably do not have on the payroll. Often such expertise exists only within the industries or institutions with the largest financial stake in the outcome; sometimes, as with mad cow disease, such expertise has not yet been sufficiently developed. In either case, before the public becomes alarmed, policy tends to be determined by these interest groups. Afterwards, at least in democracies, the technical crisis is inevitably compounded by a crisis of public relations. Politicians must be seen to act quickly and firmly, whether or not they have any basis for their actions.

Such can-do decision making, however impressive and reassuring in the heat of the moment, is unlikely to produce wise policy. On the contrary, it risks catastrophe. It was sobering to realize, during the spring of 1996, that it was impossible for politicians in power to acknowledge that they lacked sufficient information to decide how to protect people from the threat of mad cow disease. It was therefore impossible for them to act with appropriate circumspection—to concede that there are times when discretion is indeed the better part of valor. If the protracted scandal of mad cow disease were to lead to a recognition of this problem, that would constitute a faintly silver lining.

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Compression Wood

FRANKLIN BURROUGHS

I teach English in Maine, and I come from Conway, South Carolina. When I was young, an old lady introduced me to the facts of life. "Up north," she said, "all they want to know is 'What do you do?' Down south, all they care about is 'Where do you come from?'"

In my childhood, that was welcome news. The northern question would obviously be harder to answer than the southern one, since it required self-justification. So I figured I might as well stay put. I wouldn't have to *do;* I could simply *be,* as though I were an aristocrat along the lines of John of Gaunt or Guy of Warwick: Franklin of Conway.

Before I was a great deal older, I discovered more facts of life, and one of them was that most of the people I knew, North and South, were de facto copperheads or carpetbaggers—Confederate Yankees or Yankee Confederates. Whichever question they asked you first, the other one was sure to follow.

If you think about it, it could hardly be otherwise, whether you are answering to a stranger or just talking, as usual, to yourself. Your boss or your conscience accosts you and demands one thing: "What have you *done* for me lately?" You can't very well answer that you have come from where you came from. But there are plenty of other times when you are doing whatever it is that the boss or your conscience has gotten you into and you are suddenly overcome by the sheer speciousness of it. There has been some ludicrous or lamentable misapprehension. You are not so much an impostor as a case of mistaken identity. Who are all these people and who are you? Why are you all in such solemn earnest, like so many emperors assiduously complimenting each other on their new and identical and non-existent wardrobes?

It probably doesn't make much difference whether you stay home or light out for the territories. Even Thoreau, who strove to shrink the gap

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between vocation and location to the disappearing point, often felt, as he said, "a certain doubleness, by which I stand as remote from myself as from another," and that enabled him to see Concord as though it were a distant land, from which he was writing home, to a kinsman. Something about writing, or even about the committed kind of reading that is a vicarious form of writing, takes you well away from your life and makes you homesick for it.

This essay is about a poem, Gerard Manley Hopkins's "Pied Beauty," because writing or talking about poems is one of the things that English professors profess to do. We have been doing it, in ever-increasing numbers, for almost the whole of this century. The more something is written or talked about, the less real and distinct it becomes. If you attend to the doings of English professors these days at all—if you so much as know the difference between a deconstructionist and a dirt dauber—then you know that this is a fact. You know that we are now unsure whether a poem is really a poem or just an overprivileged text, which in turn turns out to be not a text but a mere pretext for the next metatextual meditation.

I am uncomfortable with this state of affairs, but will avail myself of the license it grants and talk about "Pied Beauty" in an utterly idiosyncratic way, which is from the perspective of where I come from and how that consorts with what I do.

I was in fact driving north through Pennsylvania, headed from Conway back up toward Maine, and so just about exactly halfway between where I come from and what I do, when Hopkins's poem came into my mind. Hopkins isn't anybody I regularly teach or ever write about, but I had loved his poems when I first read him as an undergraduate, and that had led me to memorize a few. An enthusiasm of that kind is like a wonderful correspondence that you carry on for a while—it runs in your head and affects how you see and describe to yourself the things around you. As is usual in such cases, the enthusiasm waned, the correspondence dried up, not because of any particular reason, but just because of the way the same old same old takes over your life and you don't have any time for such things, and perhaps do not like to face the contrast between your imaginary and your actual existence.

It was a small and pleasant surprise, then, to find myself back in touch with Hopkins, and able at least partially and approximately to reassemble "Pied Beauty" out of my memory. But right now I need to leave him again and tell about this trip south and how, near the end of it, as I drove north through Pennsylvania, the poet and the poem came to mind.

This was three or four years ago, in March, which is the best season for such a junket. When you drive south from New England at that season, you also drive ahead, into springtime—the weeks hurtle past as though your life were in fast-forward. When you return north, you go

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backward, the season rewinding itself, unfrocking the trees, silencing the birds, returning the daffodils to the cold storage of the bulb. It's like crossing the international date line, and then crossing it back. You've gained time, and then you've lost almost all of it again, and the only evidence that the whole trip wasn't just a hallucination is the odometer.

There are other changes besides the seasonal one that accompany the journey south. When you stop for gas in the Virginia tidewater, you hear that something has happened to the language. Tongues seem to have lost their agility. Vowels and consonants thicken and soften; cadences and sentences ooze and eddy and ebb, and you can stand there, half listening to the attendant and half thinking of the silt-laden, leisurely rivers and streams and swamps that wind through this flat country and in fact created it, and wonder if they also had a kind of subliminal shaping effect on what had come across the Atlantic as English.

Along with this change in the language, there is also another one for me, one that has less to do with going from North to South than with going from what I do to where I come from.

Teaching English means a day-to-day linguistic environment of lectures, seminars, conferences, committee meetings, office hours, recommendations. Professionally speaking, this world of words is the only string in my fiddle, the only capital I've got to invest, and the only return the investment brings. But knowing that makes the words seem more like walls than like windows, because their circuit seems so closed. They beget each other endlessly, weave a web that unravels even as it is being woven from the yarn of yesterday's web.

South Carolina, God knows, is also a world of words. But because I neither commit professional activities nor associate with those who do when I am there, the words still seem to speak to me, as the old lady did, about the facts of life. Around a college, if a man is said to be outstanding in his field, it probably indicates that he knows and writes a great deal about a relatively specialized topic. Around Conway, if a man is said to be out standing in his field, it quite possibly indicates that he is shooting doves. It isn't that the one kind of activity is superior to the other. It's just that it's a relief to be reminded occasionally that words, like people, came from somewhere to start with and had a pedestrian solidity there. Packed off to college, they gain an upward mobility into abstraction and, with it, a wider reference. Intellectual gain can be imaginative loss. *This man was outstanding in his field* sounds like an epitaph—a flat assertion and end of story. *This man was out standing in his field* sounds like the beginning of a story: because the man is in space, he is in time, and time will require him to do and to die, and so a certain suspense is involved.

Anyway, I went to South Carolina three or four springs ago, when timber salvage from Hurricane Hugo was still going on. And one of the places it was going on was about fifty miles south of Conway, in the

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Santee Refuge, where it was being performed with scrupulous care by the lowest bidder. He was in fact charging the state nothing at all except the right to a certain percentage of the timber he salvaged and an electrical hookup for his secondhand, Eisenhower-administration Airstream trailer, where he would live until he had finished the job. This was my peripatetic friend McIver, somebody I grew up with and was not destined to outgrow. I went down to the Refuge to join him for a couple of days of what was business as usual for him, and the finest kind of truancy for me.

McIver had set up his portable sawmill on a sandy ridge, under some young live oaks. We'd spent the morning sawing the last few logs he had there, and now were stacking and sorting lumber. It was all longleaf pine—bold-grained, handsome, heavy wood. The wood, our clothes, and the sawdust underfoot were all so redolent of turpentine that it evoked studios and painting classes, and got you thinking about the proximity of the most sophisticated arts to the most elementary ones. What we lifted, lugged, and stacked were timbers: six-by-sixes, four-by-fours, two-by-fours—structural stuff. There were also planks, of assorted standard widths and lengths and various grades. The timbers we piled according to their dimensions; the planks we piled according to their grade.

And, McIver being McIver, what we lifted, lugged, and stacked also included slats and stakes, wood you might use to build a chicken coop or prop up your tomatoes. He can't bear throwing anything away. He'd had a partner once, and the partner quit, being unable to see the economic logic of sawing slats that might bring five dollars a bundle, provided you could find the time to bundle them and the gardeners to buy them. But economics for McIver has always been a branch of applied philosophy, and philosophy a sort of folk art, like making patchwork quilts, where you stitch together something that will serve your purpose and express your sense of proportion and design out of whatever odds and ends and bits and pieces come to hand. Partners, of either the business or the connubial variety, have always found upon closer examination that this philosophy is chiefly admirable from a distance, and now my hardheaded old friend lives and works alone.

With regard to trees and lumber and a good many other things, his credo is simple. "I waste nothing," McIver says, "except my time."

You pile lumber as though it were fragile. Each pile is level. There is a half-inch gap between each pair of planks in each tier of lumber, and the tiers are separated from each other by stringers—narrow battens that McIver saws from slabwood. The stringers are roughly half an inch wide and exactly half an inch thick, a little longer than the tier is wide, and placed across it at three-foot intervals. As the pile mounts, the weight coming to bear on the lower levels also mounts. As long as that weight is

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evenly distributed, there is no harm in this, and even some good—it reduces the tendency of the planks to bow or bend as they dry. But if one stringer is even slightly thicker or thinner than the others, it will stress the board it rests on and the board that rests on it as the weight piles up. So we stack meticulously and methodically—the right plank properly placed on the right pile—as though we were file clerks or librarians reshelving books.

Spaced along the sandy road, the stacks of new-cut wood are pleasing. They are overhung by the gnarled oaks with their streamers of moss; the leafy shadows and soft humid light flit and flicker over them. They draw the eye and hold it. If you block from your sight and thinking the saw, the sawdust, and the slabwood—all the evidence of ordinary human agency and ordinary economic activity—the whole scene, a random imposition of strict, rectilinear order on the disorder of nature, exerts a minor spiritual magnetism, as though you'd come upon some rudimentary, homemade Stonehenge.

Such money as McIver makes will come from the smallest of the piles of planks—top quality, cabinet-grade lumber. Longleaf is a slow-growing pine, almost as dense and hard as oak. From the standpoint of commercial forestry, it is a tree that wastes time. Economics pretty well dictates that you re-seed a plot with slash or loblolly, fast-growing trees, once you've cut the longleaf. But no other pine produces its quality of lumber. The slow years get stored in the grain; they become strength inseparable from beauty. The wood is prized for flooring, paneling, furniture.

We hoist a plank, examine one side. Smooth, straight-grained, no knots. We flip it and examine the other side. It looks fine to me, but McIver sighs. He wants to put it on the small pile, the money pile; but instead it goes in with the lowest grade of all—the next step down would be the sawdust pile.

"What was wrong with that one?" I ask him. "SAT scores too low?"

"Nope," he says. "Compression wood. See?" I see, but only because I am shown.

Compression wood comes from a leaning tree. The force of gravity would cause the trunk to bend and sag, and eventually to break, if the tree did not automatically respond by a more rapid, denser production of cellular wood along the underside of the trunk—something like the tensing of a muscle to resist whatever pushes or pulls against it. Once the counterpressure is removed, a tensed muscle can relax. But a plank isn't like that. It can't forget the torques and tensions that shaped it as part of a living and misaligned organism. Freed from the log, it will contort itself, warp, wrack, or bulge, no matter how long you cure it or how much you clamp, nail, steam, or spike it. Under stress, it may snap with explosive suddenness.

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McIver and I grew up within a few hundred yards of each other, went through school and then to college together. We get along because we are in the habit of it, and understand our roles. Mine combines the wise guy, the Fancy Dan, and the straight man. "Look," I say to him from my end of the plank. "What we are talking about here is neurosis, pure and simple. This plank ain't a *bad* plank. It just suffers from post-traumatic stress syndrome. Has anybody ever tried a little elementary psychotherapy on compression wood?"

McIver gives me a look. He's missing a little finger; he has, as consequence of a misstep taken in Southeast Asia, slivers of shrapnel in one leg and a custom-fitted, stainless-steel patch in his skull. "No need for them to try it on compression wood," he says. "They've tried it elsewhere. And I am here to tell you, *it don't work.*"

When he's in his customary mode of working alone, McIver has a transistor radio with headphones. He listens exclusively to the local NPR station, except when it plays jazz, which he dislikes. When it schedules jazz, he schedules chain sawing, which makes listening impossible in any case. If there's no chain sawing to be done, he may shift over briefly to a Top 40, evangelical, or talk station—fluff, salvation, or the vox populi, against which to hone his disdain. But mostly he likes the NPR news of local and global affairs. It requires him to adjust his homemade philosophic patchwork so that it can incorporate a mosaic of rumors, wars, trends—epidemics of revolution, multinational finance, resurgent tribalism, ecological catastrophe, congressional reform, the colonization of cyberspace, and the long-term outlook for the catfish industry—all of this to be seriously mulled over while he aligns the log on the carriage, walks the little high-pitched band saw down through the log, and lays off the planks he will stack later, to Mozart, Haydn, Debussy.

He knows where he stands and why he stands there. You could blindfold him and put him down anywhere in North America, remove the blindfold, and tell him only what month it was. If the place had trees, he would find them and study them. It might take a day or two. Then he would tell you where he was—latitude, longitude, elevation. He might be wrong, but he would not be hesitant beforehand or apologetic afterward. He would prefer his way of being wrong to your way of being right. His way involves independent observation and deduction, the laws of Humboldt, a close reading of habitat through a coherent idea of geography. Yours involves numbered highways and road signs, mere slogans and hearsay. You might as well stay home and read a map.

The barrage of world news and news closer to home confirms his faith in what he calls primary resources—wood, crops, animals, ores: things that come out of the earth and water to provide us food, fuel, and shelter.

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In the course of one conversation, McIver lays down a law: "People who don't work with primary resources don't understand reality. And not understanding reality is a functional definition of insanity." That leads him inevitably to conclude that the trouble with the world today is that the inmates are running the asylum. You need to be grounded and rooted in geography; you need to understand that money measures time in one way and a longleaf pine measures it in another. The pine can make money, but the money can't afford to return the favor. If McIver were Robinson Crusoe, alone on his desert island, his way of thinking and living would require surprisingly few adjustments. He achieves by logic and implacable opinion what Crusoe achieved by shipwreck: isolation, and the consequent opportunity to re-invent civilization, starting with the simplest necessities and working up and out from them.

When he isn't on a job and living in the Airstream trailer, he lives in Conway, on an otherwise respectable street. The house hasn't been painted in a long time, nor has the shrubbery been trimmed, the grass mowed, or the mildew or the rot in any way inconvenienced in their operations. A row of small sweet gums has sprouted in a gutter; every year, the whole structure has faded a little further back into nature, and now, except for its size, it resembles an abandoned duck blind. Inside, the only sign of neatness is in the front corner of the living room, where there are a small table and chair beside a window, and some bookshelves made of pine he cut himself. In those things, you can recognize the tidy, thrifty worker. On the table is a complicated mechanism for sharpening the band-saw blades. He comes here every week or two, bringing an accumulation of blades, and sits down and sharpens. It is as precise as any task a jeweler does. He dons glasses and a scholarly air. Every tooth must be aligned just so, raked alternately to one side and the other. When he is done, the facets of the teeth gleam delicately and sliver paper or skin as elegantly as a razor.

The rest of the room and the rest of the house are bad to look at. Possessions have become jetsam. They are thrown on chairs, jammed in closets, abandoned on the floor. You let appearances slide, and it is harmless; then you let them slide further, let them go altogether, and discover that there was more reality in them than you thought. They take away whatever energy and self-respect you had invested in them, and they keep it. There is grit in the rug; a scum of dust, as thick as the springtime pollen, covers everything. Even a man in his worst, most worn-out working clothes would wipe off any surface before he sat on it. McIver doesn't have a vacuum cleaner, which doesn't matter because the electricity has been cut off for months. "And anyway," he says, looking at the clutter, "I don't need a vacuum cleaner. I need a backhoe."

When he was a boy, he was neat, his room as spruce and spare as a barracks. It was the same in college and in the marines. After that he was

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a smoke jumper in the United States Forest Service, and smoke jumpers, whatever else they are, are fanatically orderly about their personal effects, packing and repacking their parachutes, maintaining their gear as though their lives depended on it, because their lives depend on it. He smoke jumped for more years than anybody in the history of the organization; in a book I can't sufficiently praise, *Young Men and Fire,* Norman McLean refers to him in passing simply as "Rod McIver, dean of the Montana smoke jumpers." When he finally landed wrong and ruined his knee and couldn't jump anymore, the Forest Service told him that if he'd accept a desk job for five years, he would qualify for a pension that would pretty much take care of him for the rest of his life. He declined, took his severance pay, came home, and used the money to buy his portable mill.

Somewhere along the way, he lost his aptitude for domestic life and developed a great harshness toward that side of himself which still craved it. That was what his house said, and in bleak moments he comes close to saying it himself. Indispensable small tools, hardware, and spare parts that might get buried and lost in the rubbish of his house, he keeps in his disconnected refrigerator. He steps carefully over a pile of magazines, opens the refrigerator door, and takes out a packet of sheet-metal screws. You half expect to see him sit down at the kitchen table, toss them lightly in WD-40, and eat them.

"Some people think of a house as a home," McIver says. "I prefer to think of it as an equipment shed. Where I sometimes store myself." And he says one thing more to me before I go back to Maine. "Drop by and see Mama before you go. It always pleases her. She says you're my last link to civilization."

I would have done so in any case. When we were growing up, I knew her house as well as my own; I came and went in it as freely and breathed in it almost more freely. I stop by on the last morning, on my way out of town.

She is retired from teaching now, old and crippled by arthritis. We sit in her small parlor, a room that has scarcely changed from my childhood: the same furniture, the same Audubon print of the wild turkey over the hearth, the coal grate on the hearth, and beside it a scuttle and a basket. The scuttle is filled with coal, the basket is mounded with longleaf pinecones. These are spent cones, their teeth splayed open; you can pick them up by the bushel in the Santee Refuge. In both size and shape, they roughly approximate footballs. In the basket, they are woody, dark, and handsome, with the understated decorative look of dried flowers. She prizes them for that, but also because they are an excellent kindling. Like much in her household, they combine simplicity, a provident thriftiness, and a natural elegance that I wish I could have absorbed by osmosis, simply from all the hours and days and years spent there.

We talk for a while, and then it is time to go. With difficulty, she sees

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me to the door, and we stand there a minute longer. She asks about the drive back up to Maine. How long does it take? Are the roads safe? Is my car reliable? And that leads her to fret some, and not for the first time, about her son's truck. He bought it right after he was discharged from the marines. Now, like his house, it appears to be held together by force of habit rather than by any surviving principle of structural integrity. The door on the passenger side is wired shut, but a passenger could conceivably escape, if he had to, through the floor, which yawns open like a bomb bay between his feet. The odometer conked out somewhere in the Great Plains, five or six years ago, at 297,411 miles. It's getting hard to find spare parts now. Even the most comprehensive junkyards aren't likely to have a supply of '69 Ford F 250 pickups on hand, and McIver doesn't like parking the truck too close to a junkyard anyway, for fear that when he gets back to it, he may find that another customer, by a perfectly innocent and natural confusion, has removed some one of its remaining operative systems.

"You know," Mrs. McIver says, "I do worry about that old truck. I'm afraid that one of these days it's going to break right down and leave him by the road. I wish he'd take it now while it's still running and just trade it in."

I say that I guess that's right, but that he has had the truck for so long that it seems like part of his personality now.

"Well, yes," says Mrs. McIver. "And sometimes I wish he'd just trade *that* in too."

Then I drove back north, trading longleaf pine for white pine, dahoon and yaupon for bayberry and viburnum, sweet gum for sugar maple, cypress for hemlock, and always losing species as I drove, moving through arboreal environments of progressively diminishing complexity until I was back in Maine, which has wound up being home. That coincided with another process of simplification, as experience became memory, and memory concentrated on some details and lost others. By the time I was up into Pennsylvania, the days spent with McIver had reduced themselves to a single image, something I could pick up and turn over and squint at from several angles—the plank of compression wood, as a metaphor or an epitome, or maybe just a souvenir.

Most obviously, the plank could be taken to stand for my old friend himself. Something that could not forget the history that had shaped it and had necessitated and justified its idiosyncrasies. Something that so perfectly incorporated the stresses and misalignments and imperatives of the circumstance from which it had been abstracted that it would never accept as real or rational any other circumstance to which fate consigned it. Something that did not fit in; that was, to the vexation of all concerned, a manifestly high-quality article of rare integrity, ingrained recalcitrance, and small market value.

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But even as a metaphor, compression wood does not keep still; in the environment of the mind, few things do. I considered the difference between McIver's world and my own, the difference between days spent handling wood and days spent handling paper. Both the wood and the paper came from trees, but only the wood reminded you of that fact. At the end of a day of sawing, you had a product—the trim, carefully organized stacks of lumber. This is what we have done since we became human—taken things out of nature and shaped them into a secondary environment for ourselves. McIver has always seemed to me to appreciate better than most what is lost and what is gained in the process. He might run his fingers over a fine plank. When the wood is first exposed to air, it is moist and smooth and alive. "The best finish you can put on good lumber will never make it look quite as pretty as it does when it's first cut," McIver says, "but that's what it should try to do. Otherwise, it's vandalism."

All I ever have to show for my work is paper: a paycheck at the end of the month, a grade sheet at the end of term, and, at erratic intervals, something printed somewhere. Not much sense of product there—nothing to stand back from, and wipe the sawdust of it off your hands, and admire.

Writing is in fact a mystery, an invention that grew out of the most mysterious and revolutionary human invention of all, which was language—the environment we inhabit and that inhabits us. Of all the secondary environments we have created, language seems the most like a natural system, something that grows, evolves, embraces, metamorphoses, and hybridizes according to laws that we can partially deduce but didn't devise and can't control. But when you are using it all the time, talking to yourself even when you are trying to listen to somebody else, language doesn't seem mysterious or revolutionary at all. It seems like self-generated static.

So it was a great satisfaction, as I drove back north, to try to picture McIver's world again, to replay the days on the sandy ridge. You'd watch the small saw travel through the log. You'd rotate the log a quarter turn with a cant hook, level it, and watch the saw go through again. You'd do this twice more. The lumpy, imperfect carcass of the log—tree trunks are far less straight and cylindrical than we imagine them to be—gives birth to solid geometry. It is not as though the tree were being dismembered. It is as though its innate idea, its inmost formal principles, were being elucidated. There is something Greek about it, something out of Plato by way of Euclid and Pythagoras. Even after you'd spent a day lifting and lugging, an individual board could stop you short with its beauty—the wavering, flamelike fluency of the grain arrested by the severe, abstract symmetry of the plank.

Geometry and *geography* share the same root. Geometry came into being because we needed to measure the earth, so that we could compre-

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hend and claim our place on it. Speaking of the arts that created civilization, Yeats said very simply what seems to me very simply true: "Measurement began our might." From it came the pyramids, the Roman roads, the sciences of cartography, architecture, astronomy, mechanics, and so forth. And also, more obliquely, the measures of music and poetry, the power of aural, visual, and intellectual form over what Yeats called the "mere complexity" of experience. *Ratio* and *rationality* also come from a single root, suggesting that reason itself has to do with measured proportions and connects back, via geometry, to geography—the ground that is under our feet.

The plank that McIver unhappily examined and sentenced to the junk pile—that plank looks like the fly in the ointment. It conformed to standard dimensions but would not conform to standardized purposes. Like the other lumber, it seemed an expression of something innately Euclidean in a tree. But it also expressed something stubbornly local, peculiar to the particular life of that particular tree.

However much I might think of McIver by analogy to the plank of compression wood, he himself could afford to think of it only as he thinks of most things, unsentimentally and literally. The plank was of minimal utility; it might do for sheathing on a pigsty. But as I drove back north, back toward my own work, I found myself thinking of the plank in almost exactly the opposite way. In its lack of extrinsic or practical value, it resembled a work of art. Whatever value it had could only be intrinsic, generated by a rationale peculiar to itself, the outcome of a single organism's negotiation between the fixed reality in which it was rooted and the unpossessable light that it required. To make the process of my thinking much more conclusive and schematic than it actually was, I thought of the plank as a specimen of the kind of writing that gets called literature, of the tree as the writer who produced it, and of the forest as the writer's milieu, the place where he or she lived, drew nourishment, and contrived to grow up out of.

Where you're from is never simply a matter of geography. It involves intersections of history, economics, family, and so forth, as well as the coordinates of latitude and longitude. Self-location, with or without maps, is ultimately as complicated and incomplete a process as self-knowledge. Something in us won't keep still. Geography gave us geometry; geometry gave us ratios and rationality, and rationality can remove us from the face of the earth, enabling us to live entirely in the secondary environments it creates. We can especially begin to live exclusively in the world of words, without even considering that that is what has happened. We sign checks and contracts, buy, sell, gossip, read the sports page, and think no more about language than we do about the boards in the floor under our feet. When it is taken for granted that way, language gets

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predictable, and because we live inside its walls, we begin to get the uneasy sense of being confined in a bland, elastic prison. In it, we seem to have words only for thoughts that have already been thought, and for emotions and perceptions that don't quite feel like our own.

I think that literature is made because some people find this state of affairs unwholesome and undertake to do something about it. The works that seem to have mattered and lasted seldom grow out of or reflect a life that is tranquilly organic and rooted; they are more likely to involve some sensation of displacement—of being out of place, or cut off from place, or imprisoned by place. The place that causes the discomfort isn't the actual geography. It is the atmosphere of assumptions that lies over it and seems to insulate us from it. What is assumed that way gradually becomes invisible.

It was these thoughts, which really began as just another kind of timber salvage, that eventually brought Hopkins to mind. I was not at that time thinking about his life—when you learn about a poet poems-first, the life can seem a shadowy sort of business that takes place backstage, a footnote to the poetry. As an advantaged and splendidly educated young Englishman, he started out as something of an aesthete, with a good deal of the snobbery and priggishness that are likely to accompany that stance. Maybe his conversion to Catholicism and his entry into the Jesuit order, while outwardly an attempt to conquer or at least to mortify that part of his nature, were in reality expressions of it. He does not appear to have ever truly escaped from himself and into his vocation. He no doubt struggled to love and serve his poor and mostly Irish parishioners and students in Liverpool and Dublin, but *caritas*, because it never wholly overcame his sense of genteel birth, his very English fastidiousness, winds up making those qualities in him seem especially unlovely, small, and sour.

"Pied Beauty" hardly brings such a constricted, self-enclosed life to mind. One line from it came to me partway through Pennsylvania as I was mulling over the piece of compression wood: "All things counter, original, spare, strange." Those four adjectives that clash and echo against each other seemed to formulate what I had been fumbling toward, as I recalled the almost worthless plank of longleaf pine and the sawyer who sawed it.

Remembering the rest of the poem was harder. Like somebody struggling with a difficult crossword puzzle, I very imperfectly and provisionally filled in around that one line, and knew that I was missing some parts and misplacing others. It is good to have something like that to occupy your mind when you are driving, and I would not have looked up "Pied Beauty" if I'd had it on the seat beside me. But by the time I got home, I was ready to give in. I got the book down from the shelf, and there it was in its abrupt, contorted perfection, and here it is:

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Glory be to God for dappled things—
  For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow;
    For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;
  Landscape plotted and pieced—fold, fallow, and plough;
    And áll trádes, their gear and tackle and trim.

All things counter, original, spare, strange;
  Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
    With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:
                Praise Him.

A poem is not the same poem from reading to reading, because the reader is not the same reader. What I could see now was a development I would not have seen when I was an undergraduate and knew almost nothing about what things I could and couldn't, would and wouldn't, leave behind me in Conway.

The poem starts with *God* and *things*—two thoroughly nondescript nouns from opposite ends of the metaphysical spectrum. The next three lines are all dappled things, images out of nature—skies, cow, trout, chestnuts, finches' wings. They are seen kaleidoscopically—disconnected and conflated and piecemeal all at once. This is hardly the expected, stable, and stabilizing view of Nature as an evidence of faith.

The sixth line now seems to me the true pivot of the poem, and it is a surprise. It isn't about natural things at all, but about the gear and tackle and trim of all trades, the creations of men, not of God. It appears to grow out of the line just before, when Hopkins is looking at the landscape. The landscape is pied and beautiful because of human intervention. It is *plotted*—divided into small plots, fields with different crops, hedgerows, and so forth; it looks *pieced* together, like a quilt. *Fold, fallow,* and *plough* add detail: a fold is an enclosure for keeping livestock; fallow is ground left out of cultivation; and plough, as it is used here, refers to tillage land, land that is ploughed and planted as opposed, for example, to pastures or orchards. But the word also suggests the actual implement—the plough that does the ploughing—and that takes us to the line about the trades and their tools, almost as though those trades had grown up out of the earth itself.

Those trades show up in other poems by Hopkins. They are the manual trades of rural England—ploughing, blacksmithing, scything. One of the ways Hopkins freed himself from the Victorian nature poem was by watching and listening to the uneducated practitioners of these trades. The opportunity to do so may have been one of the few rewards of his difficult and unhappy choice of life. His poetry borrowed these

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people's tools and it borrowed their vocabulary, too—for example, the odd dialect word *brinded* in the second line. And perhaps it borrowed something larger and more basic. The people who used the tools fit McIver's definition of sanity—they were working with primary resources. They were at the point where human purpose and natural process encounter each other with some violence. The tools of the trade are sharp, sturdy, hot, and heavy; you can't handle them absentmindedly. I feel something analogous to that violence, that muscular strain and strife, in Hopkins's language, its brusque dismissal of traditional mellifluousness. This quality is what saves his poetry from conventional piety or conventional melancholy, and makes his poems in praise of God sudden and powerful, like momentary, ecstatic inversions of despair.

So the first half of the poem is all natural images until the sixth line, where we find the tools that convert natural creations into human ones. The second half of the poem has no images. It's virtually all adjectives. We leave the world of vivid perceptions and enter a world where language seems to generate itself. *Fickle* begets *freckled* by a recombination of consonants. *Swift, slow*; *sweet, sour*; *adazzle, dim* are produced by logical opposition and alliteration. Observation has led to generalization; the things of this world have led us out of this world, into language. That is the development in the poem that I was able to see this time, its unintended plot. And that is, almost inevitably, the plot of much of what is loosely called nature writing, hard though nature writers try to avoid it.

And it was also pretty much the plot of my trip to South Carolina and back. In one way, its final point was the familiar one about how words always manage to lose most of the cargo they are sent to fetch and how your thought winds up chasing its own tail, while language once again builds up its wall around you.

But the world outside poems and essays—the world they come from and yearn toward—exists in its literal and unliterary processes, its power, and its indifference to whatever language may make or unmake of it. I can pick up the telephone on my desk and dial McIver's number. He has a phone; he now pays the bills. Even more remarkably, he also has an answering machine. It is necessary to his business. The voice that comes over the line isn't the least bit cordial: "You have reached the residence of Rod McIver. I am either unable or unwilling to answer the phone at present. Leave your message and a number where you can be reached." The machine was the cheapest one on the market, and he paid a little extra to get a free-replacement-at-absolutely-no-charge guarantee for it. He renews the guarantee each time they have to replace the machine, and fears only that some day they'll give him one that will outlast its warranty. But thus far that hasn't happened, and he deals with his calls every week or so, when he comes in to sharpen his blades.

And so I know that he has traded—*jettisoned* would be more like it,

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he'd say—his truck, without discernible effect on his personality. He is through with the salvage job at the Santee Refuge now and is doing small contract jobs out in the county around Conway and in the neighboring counties. As an independent businessman, he is still going nowhere, at thirty-two feet per second per second. "I hope to hit the grave so hard I bounce," he says, quite cheerfully.

McIver's work can be agreeable in the early spring and late fall, and it's really best of all during bright winter weather. But you don't even want to think about what it's like from the middle of May until early October. The insects alone are enough to make you swear off fresh air forever. The heat builds up and bears down. It thrums inside your skull, like a bad fever. You get light-headed. The trunks of the pines across the clearing wobble and ripple in your sight, as though they, or your eyes, were actually melting.

The only thing for it is method, method. Every hour, McIver checks the coolant level in the saw. Then he pulls out his pocket watch and takes his pulse. If it's over 140, he stops, shuts off the saw, and clambers up onto the bed of the truck and lies down, a piece of cheesecloth over his face to keep off the bugs. He takes his pulse every three minutes. As soon as it drops out of the red zone, he clambers back down and prepares to restart the saw.

In the buzzing, dizzying glare, he moves slowly, ponderously, like a diver in his diving suit, sleepwalking through an atmosphere almost opaque with heat. The world can look strange then, as if it were in the process of growing unreal, sublimating itself into a mirage. You have to breathe carefully, and keep calm, and focus only on the task immediately in front of you, and not think about any future beyond the end of one more day, the completion of one more load of lumber. You cannot ask yourself what you are doing here, or why you are doing it, because those questions lack answers that would fit anybody's definition of sanity. You can only keep doing it, doggedly, deliberately, scrupulously, as though in obedience to something, or in honor of it.

At such times, I want to say to him that he is my last link to the point of origin, where originality must return to measure itself. But he is sun-stunned, a little addlebrained, and he fumbles at this Fancy Dannery for a minute, trying to get his mind around it.

"Origin?" he asks. "Originality?" You can almost see the sluggish engine resisting the starter, churning heavily against its inertia. Finally it fires, coughs, catches, runs roughly at first, and then smooths out. The gears mesh and engage, and now the invincible aphorist is back in business. "The wages of originality is failure. Or maybe it's the other way around. I don't know. I don't care. Either way," McIver says to me, "I aim to get paid in full."

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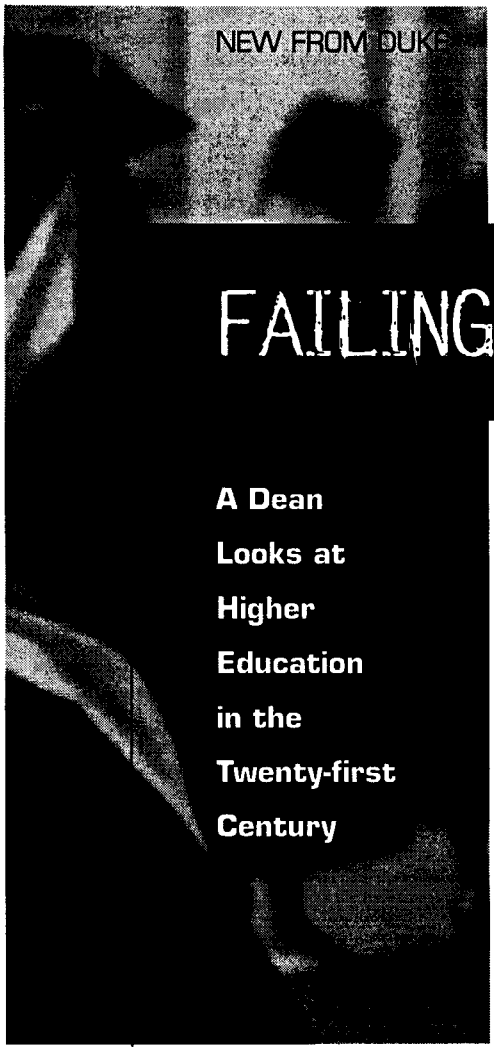

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THE UNCERTAIN ART

Prooemium

SHERWIN B. NULAND

There is a wisdom in the acceptance of uncertainty. Well used, it can make a philosopher of an ordinary man. To the intuitive mind of the twenty-two-year-old John Keats, that precious insight appeared in a flash of understanding one day in 1817, while he was deep in conversation on a long walk with two friends. "[S]everal things dovetailed in my mind, & at once it struck me, what quality went to form a Man of Achievement," he later wrote in a letter to his brothers. "I mean *Negative Capability*, that is when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts." To become comfortable with uncertainty is one of the primary goals in the training of a physician.

Keats wrote those words—italics and all—during the period when he was composing *Endymion*. Less than a year earlier, he had stopped attending the lectures that were to prepare him for the examinations of the Royal College of Surgeons. Although poetry and the pursuit of sunbeams had long since become Keats's passions, he had been anything but an indifferent student. The statements of contemporaries attest to his skillful performance of clinical duties, and he had already qualified to practice medicine in July 1816, following a year's study at Guy's Hospital. Medical education was brief in those days. Although the examinations were difficult, there was little of real usefulness to learn.

It was not possible for a perceptive man to study medicine in the early nineteenth century without becoming aware of the degree to which patient care was conducted in a pervasive atmosphere of inexactness. Like all young doctors of the time, Keats very likely admired his teachers at Guy's all the more for their ability not only to be decisive in the face of uncertainty but actually to thrive in the absence of clear clinical signposts. Most doctors did not even know the basic principles of physical examination, which were just then being introduced—and in Paris, no less. It was in 1816, in fact, that René Laennec, a Breton who at five feet three inches was almost as diminutive as Keats himself, invented the stethoscope.

For physicians, the nineteenth century was characterized by the gradual infiltration of new scientific findings into medical thought. The process accelerated rapidly in the 1880s and 1890s as the products of laboratory investigations in physiology and bacteriology were finally shown to be of practical use at the bedside. By the first decade of the twentieth century, an increasingly credible scientifically based medicine had routed the forces of homeopathy and the other irregular sects that, until then, had retained some hope of gaining ascendancy. From that point onward, the Holy Grail would be a form of practice based on knowledge gained by observation, hypothesis, experiment, and verification, in which uncertainty, if a factor at all, would be quickly dispersed by the next series of laboratory or epidemiological studies—a discipline, in other words, that might with real justification come to be called a science.

Yet even with an expanding population of trained researchers and increased funding for medical education and research, wise observers recognized the existence of problems

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unique to the practice of medicine that would forever frustrate its hopes of becoming a true science. Dr. William Osler of Johns Hopkins, at the time by far the most scientifically advanced of American medical schools, pointed this out on several occasions. "[W]ho can tell of the uncertainties of medicine as an art?" he asked rhetorically of an audience of physicians in 1903. "The science on which it is based is accurate and definite enough . . . [but] no two individuals react alike and behave alike under the abnormal conditions which we know as disease." He spoke that day of "this everlasting *perhaps* with which we have to preface so much connected with the practice of our art." Osler lauded the pursuit of probability, recognizing that to pursue certainty is to chase after an illusion. In this, he was no more than echoing the First Aphorism of Hippocrates, written twenty-three hundred years earlier: "The Art is long, life is short, opportunity fleeting, experience delusive, judgment difficult."

It is judgment that lies at the heart of diagnosis, of therapy, and of all that is gathered under the umbrella called case management. Inherent in the nature of clinical decision making is the realization that, perforce, it must always be accomplished in the face of incomplete and largely ambiguous information. The process is one of sifting, weighing, and judging, and it will ever be thus. Disease never reveals all of itself; the path toward healing may appear visible, but it is always poorly lit and subject to changes in direction. No matter what biomedical advances may realistically be expected in the future, no one who has spent more than a few months at the bedsides of the sick could find it conceivable that this imperfect state of affairs will ever change. Uncertainty is more than a constant. It is the very muse that inspires the intellectual fascination of medical practice. To accept it is the essence of wisdom; to *enjoy* it is the essence of the enrichment of a doctor's soul, exceeded only by the personal reward of helping a fellow human being in trouble. Without uncertainty, there would be no need for judgment. Without judgment, medicine would be a career for technicians and, given the intrinsic nature of illness, an impossibility.

Almost a hundred years have passed since Osler spoke of the uncertainty inherent in the art of medicine. Surely, one might ask, has not the exponential increase in scientific knowledge, especially during the past three decades, vastly changed the situation? Do we not nowadays have access to sources of information that have markedly decreased the uncertainty? The answer to both questions, of course, is yes. But the operative words are *changed* and *decreased*—not *erased.* For as long as there is individual variability in human biology; in the specific manifestations of any given disease; in the social setting in which the disease occurs; in the psychological response to disease; and, in turn, in the feedback effect of that response on the disease and the patient's perception of it—as long as all those differentiating and problematic factors exist, as they will forever, there can be no certainty in medicine, and medicine will remain an art rather than a science.

But what of the allegedly undisputable nature of the evidence on which so much of the so-called scientific medicine is based? On close inspection, much of that turns out to be disputable and even undependable. In a word, uncertain. Were it not, medical theory would not be subject to the frequent oscillations in diagnostic and therapeutic thinking that have characterized it in our era. In the past two or three decades alone, we have witnessed wide swings of expert opinion on such matters as the proper treatment of breast cancer, the cause of peptic ulcer, and the future of infectious diseases, about all of which physicians had previously felt quite certain. Other sacred cows will no doubt stop producing milk in the coming decades. The single certainty is uncertainty. Only the reliability of unreliability is to be relied on.

Medical interventions and instrumentation have traditionally entered the canon of usage without fulfilling criteria that would satisfy even the least demanding of bench scientists. Satisfaction with immediate and early results, absence of obvious harm, and habits of long custom have sufficed to keep therapies in the current arsenal and discouraged physicians from critically questioning their efficacy. As surprising as it may be to the general public and even to many physicians, medical meth-

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ods and theory stand on far less firm ground than is generally realized. Although science is the most highly regarded ingredient (with personal experience a powerful second), large if unrecognized dollops of individual bias, authoritarianism, cultural values, and even emotion find their way into bedside lucubrations. Every one of these factors—including those that on the surface seem unqualifiedly negative—has its own benefits. Each, including science and experience, likewise brings its own innate problems into the mix. When one or several ingredients inevitably change with the passage of time, medical fashions change with them. As Lynn C. Epstein, Associate Dean of Medicine at Brown University, so aptly put it: "While the continuing gains in medical knowledge and the accompanying ability of doctors to treat the sick have been real, the passage of time has too often proven the espoused remedies of one era to be of limited value or frankly harmful in the next. . . . How much of what we embrace as truth today will suffer this fate over the ensuing decades?"

Geography counts too. Significant variations in methods of treating the same disease have been shown to occur in different cities, indicating that what might be called the local medical culture is a real factor in the choices physicians make. The glaring spotlight of official attention has now been turned on such issues of medical uncertainty. Recognizing how few clinical interventions are supported by valid evidence of long-term usefulness, the federal government has established the Agency for Health Care Policy and Research to study the late effects of various medical methods. The field of so-called outcomes research—in which large numbers of patients are studied over long periods of time in an attempt to find out what really happens when one or another treatment is used—is now all the rage.

And even after such investigations have been conducted for decades, to what use can the agency's critical evaluations be put in the case of any specific patient? Given the spectrum of illness presentations, we will be left with what we have always had and always will have: the acceptance of the long-established principle that the practice of medicine is characterized by uncertainty and will always require judgment in order to be effective. That is its very nature.

Not only is the management of disease itself uncertain, but even the proper domain of a doctor's concerns is hazily demarcated and subject to vigorous debate. Every decade extends the boundaries. Today it is no longer enough to diagnose and treat organic and mental pathologies. Doctors are involved in a wide variety of problems that in previous eras were left to be solved personally, or by families, social agencies, or government bureaus. An organization of physicians has even won the Nobel Peace Prize for its ban-the-bomb activities. Whether or not one feels these subjects are appropriate for white-coated attention, the fact is that ours is an increasingly medicalized society.

Even our notions of what constitutes a sickness are widening. Who in Osler's day would have consulted a doctor because he was unhappy over the shape of his nose or unable to achieve a satisfactory erection at the age of sixty? Some of the change is the result of new technology, but some is symptomatic of the temper of our time, in which anything that causes human unhappiness is unacceptable and therefore a fair target for the physician. And some of the change is based simply on what insurance companies will pay for. Before the general advent of third-party payers, no one took a child to the emergency room because of a scraped knee.

Clearly, the definitions of medicine's limits are uncertain nowadays. So vaguely defined have they become that the Hastings Institute, America's premier bioethics think tank, has for some years been conducting an international effort called the Project on the Goals of Medicine, which seeks to answer such basic questions as what medicine should be trying to do for individuals and for the greater society.

All of which is a rather long prologue to introducing this new column in THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR and explaining the title I have chosen for it. By now, it is doubtless clear that "The Uncertain Art" refers to medicine and that I have been attempting in the foregoing paragraphs to stake out a territory

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whose boundaries are sufficiently vague that I may feel free to roam wherever inclination leads me. Roam, that is, so long as I stay within sight of my assignment, which is to write as a doctor about issues associated with doctoring.

I have chosen to interpret that word—*doctoring*—in its broadest sense, the sense of the entire spectrum of what should concern the ideal doctor. By this, I mean a man or woman trained as a physician but committed as much to the humanism of medicine as to the science. And as for science itself, I interpret that heading to include both the microcosm and the macrocosm. So many far-flung aspects of scientific study influence both biomedicine and clinical practice nowadays that none of its branches can be excluded. Our Hippocratic forebears and our colleagues who use non-Western forms of treatment have made much of the interrelationships between the health of individuals and humankind's participation in nature's surrounding universe, and I intend to do no less. Moreover, having invoked Keats in this very first essay, I have set a precedent for straying untethered when the impulse strikes, as have so many literary doctors of the past. In this, I turn for validation to William Carlos Williams, who said of his daily medical round, "[I]t was my very food and drink, the very thing which made it possible for me to write." The art of medicine is a crucible into which go and out of which come the mixtures that make life.

Just as medicine has permeated every aspect of our society, so the process of extending outward the free association of a doctor's concerns will allow for much that might seem far afield. During the first century, the Roman scholar Celsus produced a three-volume work intended to describe for the general reader all that was then known of the art of healing. He was not a physician but a member of that small band whom students of the classical period call encyclopedists, and his *De Medicina* is encyclopedic. It deals with every aspect of sickness, health, medical history, philosophy, and ethics in which an ordinary citizen might be interested. When I began thinking about this column, I could not help remembering Celsus. While his work is not exactly a prototype for what I hope to do here, his breadth of vision about what constitutes the arena of medicine provides a framework for my subject's ramifications, or at least a background against which to consider them. It is in recalling Celsus that I chose to entitle this first effort *Prooemium*, as he calls the preface in which he outlines his notions of the scope of medicine and his intentions for his writings. In my own *Prooemium*, I have tried to do just that.

Celsus stayed within the admittedly wide boundaries he set for himself, and it is my intention to do the same. Of course, should I be found to have strayed willy-nilly beyond the fuzzy edges of even the most extensive frontiers, this column may one day require its own Project on Goals. But when I consider the vastness of the territory that I can legitimately claim as my own—and the generosity with which the fruitful landscape has been endowed—that day would seem to be far off.

I have been handed a dream job.

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JOURNAL

Ann Arbor,
December 1997

WILLIAM IAN MILLER

Eight inches of snow today, the wet kind that clings to trees, cracks branches, and makes the beauties of the other seasons vulgar by comparison. Vulgar? I've got it wrong; what could be more kitsch than that flaky winter wonderland stuff? Still, I like it best, even better than fall, which always makes me feel inadequate amidst that orgy of color. With little exception, my workmates complained about the snow. Weather whiners. Ship 'em out to California.

I pedaled my bike through the snow to my office and back, which is about all the adventure my family responsibilities will allow these days. Nonetheless had a mild bit of excitement when the bike tire decided to follow its own will down a deep car-tire track in the wet snow, whereas I seemed intent on going straight. The bike and I slid down into the path of an oncoming car that fortunately was driven by a snow nerd, one of those people so unnerved by "winter driving conditions" that they go no faster than an old man in a walker. Told K when I got home to no great effect. She probably didn't believe me. In fact, she shouldn't have, for I have exaggerated the account even to myself. Otherwise it would have bored me. The bike did skid out, but I recovered within yards of the car and never crossed its path.

What is it about political theory that makes performances in that genre so routinely dull? Mind-bogglingly tedious discussions of whether *unicameral* is preferable to *bicameral.* Brain-deadening, lesion-creating treatments of checks and balances. Insipidly dim readings of Hobbes, Locke, and the other five or six books political theorists admit to their canonical texts, which do not even half fill 24 inches of bookshelf. They don't even know Hobbes was funny, making jokes from one end of *The Leviathan* to the other, dark jokes to be sure. Like this: "Sudden dejection is the passion that causeth weeping; and is caused by such accidents, as suddenly take away some vehement hope, or some prop of their power. . . . Therefore some Weep for the losse of Friends; Others for their unkindnesse; others for the sudden stop made to their thoughts of revenge, by Reconciliation."

Only one of these sheddings of tears is for something we, in our oppressive treacly piety, would allow as proper: the losse of Friends. But in the next clause it is our Friends who make us weep by their unkindness to us. This makes the meaning of the loss of friends in the first clause more troublesome. Did we lose the friends because they died or rather because they attached themselves to our enemies in unkindness? Hobbes's wit is to leave it open, but not by much, for the third clause is about the joys of revenge, or more accurately about the sadness of losing those joys to the dull safety of peace and reconciliation. Friends, it seems, are nothing but a source of tears, unless they join us in taking vengeance on our enemies, who most likely had also once been our friends. Friends, in Hobbes's mordant scheme, are those who have yet to betray us, or those with whom we have reconciled after they betrayed us once already.

Other boring debates: egoism vs. altruism, gay vs. straight, women vs. men. It seems to me that a more fruitful pairing for political, social, and moral theory is fools vs. knaves.

William Ian Miller is a Professor of Law at the University of Michigan and the author of *The Anatomy of Disgust; Humiliation;* and *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking.* Excerpts from the journals of various writers will appear regularly in the SCHOLAR.

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Imagine a major in Knave Studies, which by one account is what history, political science, and economics are anyway. Imagine a major in Fool Studies. But that would merely duplicate psychology and sociology and whatever it is they do in the Ed School. That is why we need to bring the knave and the fool together, explicitly contrasting one with the other. Do fools produce the conditions that enable knaves to thrive, or is it that knaves are just fools under another set of descriptions? Which group really runs the show? Knaves are usually thought to be brighter than fools, fools being the great sea of prey, like wildebeests, there to be culled and clipped by the knaves, who are few and élite. But we all know stupid knaves and knavish fools, mostly because we ourselves spend time in both roles, now one, now the other, depending on our particular areas of expertise and particular dispositions. One of the most knavish tricks of recent vintage is to deceive oneself in a self-aggrandizing way about one's own abilities. This used to be the mark of the fool. No longer. Remind myself to work through this sometime.

Watching Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* for the fortieth time with Louie and Eva on my lap. I am teary. The fortieth time and I fall for the rote sentimental moves yet again. But it seems to be more than just the moves made in the movie; it is also the sentiment engendered by the kids on my lap, by the association Disney animation has with my own childhood. But that I should be shedding tears (no one else in the room is; the kids and K are flinty) instead of jeering when the Beast turns into Fabio. . . . My career commitment to heroic literature is surely motivated by my embarrassment at my own sentimentality. Not true. It is just that no cheap romance can match the sentimentally evocative power of the heroic.

A related matter from last January. Went back home for the NFC title game, Packers against Carolina. My only positive religious experiences have occurred in Lambeau Field when the Packers win important games in the freezing cold. (I never have religious experiences during conventional religious services. The psychological constitution needed, for instance, to endure the repetition of the amidah—a fifteen-minute prayer that needs no repeating to bring time to a halt—without intense irritation or resentment is, for me, simply unimaginable.)

Freezing cold, I said. None of this phony lowering of the temperature with windchill calculations, just the plain facts. It is minus three degrees today, ma'am. Oh yes, and winds are gusting to thirty. Start with everyone showing up an hour early, then move to "The Star Spangled Banner," which always fills me with anxiety: Do I sing, do I stand at attention in some way that I hope will seem non-parodic, do I take my hat off, if I don't will someone knock it off? These are concerns left over from the '60s. Now I sing lustily, even though I feel a bit silly for doing so and note that the fans on the other side of the field are already breaking into cheers at "and the rockets' red glare." And I was worried about not being sufficiently pious! Propriety demands that you don't break into cheers at least until "o'er the land of the free. . . ." The cheers grow louder and spread, a total feast of misrule I think, but around me all are still singing earnestly, so I continue to sing myself, sorely tempted, however, to break into cheers.

But then, epiphany: Just at "the bombs bursting in air," roaring over my left shoulder, so low I think I can reach up and touch them, fly four F-111's in perfect formation. Well, I declare. Unreflective ecstasy. The timing is part of it, but it is mostly the pure functional lethal beauty of those fighters, the highest artistic achievement of the twentieth century. I feel a surge of tears come to my eyes, but manage, thank God, to repress them and say to my sister, trying desperately to restore my sense of irony, that I would never again complain about the defense budget. If it's going for those beautiful airplanes, count me in. But there are tears later, after the final gun, for which my sister, in an effort to keep hers at bay, mocks me.

The Packers won and no one left the stadium for almost an hour after the game. A quiet communion, astonishingly decorous. (I can only imagine that this is what religions strive for but rarely achieve outside of the remarkably successful enthusiastic religions, although they dispense with the decorum.) Five hours at minus three degrees and people wouldn't leave. All just stood at their seats, feeling religious.

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I am not sure it is as risible for people from Green Bay to behave in this way as it would be for people from San Francisco or New York. To be sure, there was in this communion a bonding with the Packers. But there was also a bonding *against*, as I think there must be in all successful bonding. Not against the Carolina Panthers. They had been defeated and we felt benevolent toward them. It was rather a bonding of small towns against large cities, to which they have been consistent losers for the last 130 years, of the Midwest and Cold North against the shallowly hedonic coasts, of dull decency against trendy slickness.

Green Bay bears a special burden for all small towns and had just discharged it heroically. Even a Jew from Green Bay like me—confused as that identity might be—feels this with a passion. I stood there moved. My self-critical faculty was operating, but it let me off lightly, thinking it amusing that I could have been swept along so, well, uncritically. But if you can't lose yourself in this, I thought, then kiss the notion of community, a notion I can mostly do without, good-bye.

Communal ritual as embarrassment. Except for sports events—actually, not even excepting them—all communal ritual behaviors make me feel silly. Touching the Torah with the prayer book and then kissing the book was more than I could ever bear, even as a kid. I always cheated, never quite kissing the book, never quite touching the Torah, finding a way to get lost in the press of those into-it souls who rushed right up without the least sign of embarrassment. And that was before I added in the aversion of thinking that the goal of all this was to bring my lips into indirect contact with the lips of all those wheezing, coughing, mucus-rich old men.

Even the Cub Scout salute, at age eight, felt degrading. Two fingers to the forehead. You knew it typed you as a weenie, not compared with the kids who were not Cub Scouts (that was long before not being a Cub Scout was cool) but compared with the Boy Scouts who got to use three fingers, and with "real people" in movies about the army who got to extend *all* their fingers. That two-fingered salute managed to turn being a little kid into a kind of moral failing.

But that paled next to the hip handshake of the late '60s and early '70s, and the awkwardnesses of whether to extend your hand straight out in the conventional style or hold it at a slight angle to ready oneself for the new grasp. No matter how you pulled it off you ended up feeling ridiculous. If you offered a conventional shake and the other guy offered the hip one, you felt uncool. If you offered the hip one and the other guy offered the conventional one, you felt like a pretentious fool. If you both joined miraculously in the hip handshake, you only felt mild relief at not having blown it, tinged with a strong sense of the phoniness of the gesture, whereas if you just met in the conventional shake, you felt relief and a small twinge of gratitude to the other for having allowed the situation to pass without the mutual destruction of dignity.

Watching women shake hands with each other. If one offers a limp hand to the other while the other shakes in a firm hearty style, who feels what kinds of embarrassments and shames?

Sex has to be procreative to be, finally, enjoyable. All the embarrassing activities that constitute sex, the tristesse, the loss of dignity, are on occasion rewarded after a time by the pleasures of baby flesh. The most unambivalently pleasurable bodily contact with another that there is, is burying your face in or just squeezing baby flesh, preferably between six months and eighteen months of age, but still pleasurable until they hit three and start to approximate humans. Of course, better that this delight be indulged immediately after the bath. Even this innocent pleasure of the flesh is not without its risks of triggering disgust.

Christmas season again and I have the flu, not the sniffling congestive kind but the all-consuming nausea kind. These flus test me morally, for I find myself in a trial of the spirit to keep from vomiting. Even though I know it might bring relief, the degradation suffered to obtain it is too great a price to pay. Vomiting threatens the soul, not just morally but physically; one fears, at least I fear, that the convulsions might be so powerful as to heave up the soul itself, and covered with pumpkin pie to

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boot. That is about as far as any attempt to give vomiting a spiritual aspect can go, for vomiting is not of the spirit, but of the grossest matter imaginable.

Some homelier issues then: It is not unusual that one vomits after eating and drinking things one likes, in fact likes too much; otherwise why eat them to excess? The remarkable thing is that on the way back up you can re-identify the ingredients of that evil visceral ragout with exquisite particularity. Yes, that's the Caesar salad, that's the brussels sprout; what was that now? Oh yes, the Sicilian olives, and, my God, the cheesecake too. And amidst all that consuming misery you are able to register amazement at the enduring individuality of the food that makes up the mélange. Truly remarkable, you think, both that foods can retain their distinctiveness once mixed together like this and that I can discern it and register surprise in my present condition. Or is it rather the foods' very refusal to give up their particular identities, their refusal to become inextricably compounded into a new substance with no traces of the original elements, that is making me sick?

The miseries of being chair of the hiring committee. I am not cut out for it. I cannot muster the courage to call references. Once I actually manage to contact one, I find the conversation so awkward that I end it before I have asked the necessary questions. Then the face-to-face interview with the fawning candidate. The first thought that still goes through my head, the head of a nearly-52-year-old academic, is could I take this guy in a fight if I had to? I think I found myself drawn to academics because it was the only profession where I could answer yes more than 70 percent of the time.

The holiday season. I still feel mildly grateful to Christians who don't say Merry Christmas to me, but now things have gotten utterly out of hand with this Happy Holidays stuff. Even the Salvation Army bell ringer says Happy Holidays. In the public school there is no Christmas program. There is plenty of Kwanza and Asian and South American stuff, even "I have a little dreidl," which is safe if there are only one or two Jews in the class—a little something for everyone for whom pity and contempt seem appropriate. But none of those beautiful Christmas carols.

How are minority groups supposed to develop the requisite hostile energy needed to remain distinct from the majority if the majority is denied the opportunity to irritate them with the smug assumption that the majority way is natural and neutral? My own sense of Jewishness would pretty much disappear if I were deprived of the feelings of awkwardness that public Christmas celebration prompted in me, that awkwardness of simultaneously loving the beautiful songs, feeling like a traitor for loving them, and hating Christians for thinking that I had no moral dilemma in singing them. Easter is a different story, a thoroughly unpleasant feast. No pleasure there except the colored eggs and the awful chocolate rabbits. That was when I got accused of killing Jesus and there were no pretty songs to compensate for the beatings.

Louie (my six-year-old) had his friend M over today. K told me how M had asked her when she was taking him home whether she liked colored lights or white lights on the trees. M offered, "I like colored ones." Then he added somewhat dejectedly, "We have white ones though; my parents think the colored ones look cheap." There is some small tragedy there in the costs of taste. I mean Christmas is not the season to be tasteful, fa la la la la la la la la. When I was growing up in Green Bay our house was the only dark one, and while looking with longing at the colored lights glowing from our tasteless neighbors' windows, I was racked with envy, perversely mixed with pride for not joining in. Eva asked if we could put blue and white Hanukkah lights out on our bushes. I refused to budge. I suppose I am as coldly malevolent as the tasteful parental Fates who made M's Christmas something less than perfect.

I always felt Jews who had Christmas trees were cowards for not turning their backs on the obvious forbidden pleasure of tree-light. What so upsets you about it, Miller? they'd ask. A Christmas tree has no religious significance and besides it's pretty. My reply: Then put it up in August.

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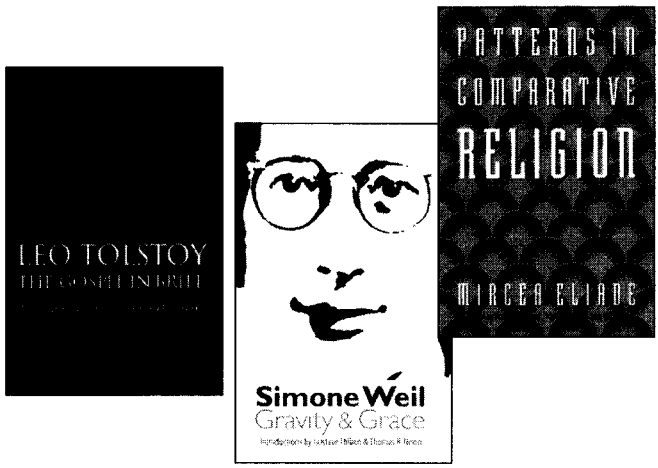
PONDERABLE thinkers



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• BOOKS •

H. C. Witwer's 1920 novel *The Leather Pushers* went for a song at the auction of boxing books and ephemera at New York's Swann Galleries in January 1997. One of six books in Lot 51, which included Budd Schulberg's *The Harder They Fall* and Harold Ribalow's *World's Greatest Boxing Stories*, it was not among the sale's more celebrated titles. My paddle was up at eighty dollars, again at ninety, and then I made my mistake. I began to think. Five of the books didn't matter to me, and ninety-five dollars is pretty steep for a book that isn't a collector's item. On the other hand, I had been looking for *The Leather Pushers* for fifteen years, which comes to about seven dollars a year, counting the buyer's premium. While I was considering all this, the lot was sold to a man one row in front of me for a hundred bucks.

Had I been wearing ten-ounce gloves, I would have beaten myself up. I was a piker, a cheapskate, a dope. But perhaps all was not lost. During the break I approached the newest owner of *The Leather Pushers* and wondered whether he might consider parting with it for a fair price. Naturally, he cocked his head at this. Did I know something he did not? Having satisfied himself that I was neither a collector nor a dealer, merely an eccentric, this splendid fellow, a partner in the brokerage house of McFadden, Farrel & Smith, announced that he would make a present of it. I, of course, wouldn't hear of such a thing. He, of course, would hear of nothing else. A week later Witwer's novel arrived in the mail.

REREADING

H.C. Witwer and Me

ARTHUR KRYSTAL

An exultant moment, yet not without a vague anxiety. Suddenly I wasn't sure that I wanted to revisit a book I had left behind such a long time ago. Instead of devouring it, I was content simply to handle it—a well-preserved 1921 cloth edition of 341 pages—and to smile at the cover illustration of two fighters flailing against a splattered red-and-white background. True, I could not resist glancing occasionally at the first paragraph, which to my relief was competently written; but then I'd put the book aside, as if not to push my luck. Finally, after a few nights of dithering, I took it to bed. I surged past the first paragraph, the first page, the second, and gradually it came to me: the reason I had hunted it down long after forgetting just about everything in it.

To be honest, I had even forgotten the book's title and author. This was a novel I had last read in 1961, when I was fourteen, and aside from the hero's name (his ring name, that is), all I could remember was that he had gone to Harvard; that his tycoon father naturally deplored his brutal vocation; that the beautiful and classy girl who loved him also deplored his brutal vocation; and that Harvard notwithstanding, the Kid went on to become the heavyweight champion of the world. I was fourteen, what did I know?

Maybe because it had been borrowed from a

Arthur Krystal is the editor of Jacques Barzun's *The Culture We Deserve*. His most recent contribution to the SCHOLAR, "The Writing Life," appeared in the Spring 1997 issue. "Rereadings"—essays about revisiting books that were originally read before the age of twenty-five—will be a regular feature of the SCHOLAR's Books department.

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classmate or maybe because the sixties had efficiently sutured off my adolescence, I forgot all about the novel. So complete was its obliteration that I picked up a paperback copy of *The Leather Pushers* at the auction preview without any bells going off. Only the name "Kid Roberts" on the back cover alerted me to the fact that *this* was the book. A moment later, the cloth edition turned up.

Recovering memories is a mysterious process. Fifteen years earlier, while I was explaining to a bemused young woman my interest in boxing and boxing literature, the name Kid Roberts, without warning, without the slightest tectonic shift in memory, suddenly burst from oblivion. One moment the book wasn't there, the next instant it was, and though the characters and plot were all muddled, I remembered distinctly how it felt to have read it. I was nuts about the book. It was what stories and reading stories was all about. And by God, I was going to find it.

I saw myself as a svelte Caspar Gutman traveling the world over in search of the black bird; but without benefit of title or author, mine was a rather messy quest. I asked around. But the people who knew literature didn't know beans about boxing books, and the people who knew boxing didn't read all that much. I checked out every secondhand bookstore in every city I visited, looking for—well, anything that might lead me further. I found plenty of rare books that way, including a copy of Conan Doyle's *The Croxley Master and Other Tales of the Ring and Camp*, but no novels about a fighter named Kid Roberts. One winter afternoon in the multilampshaded reading room of the New York Public Library, I ran my eye down tiny-lettered columns in old volumes of *Books in Print*. What was I looking for?

In time a search takes on a life of its own. Unless the longed-for object is of inherent value—a jewel-encrusted falcon—it becomes secondary to the search itself. *The Leather Pushers* was just a book, but it was a book I read when there had been no end to novels every bit as wonderful as those by H. C. Witwer, when practically every novel that fell into my hands seemed absolutely right. At fourteen, I read quickly, furiously, compulsively. I went through five, six novels a week or suffered from withdrawal. Reading at this pace is not unique among the bookish young, but as with any obsession, there is something faintly suspect about it, as if the allure of books indicts the world's ability to deliver an equivalent amount of pleasure or meaning.

Love of reading, or a reading dependency, is a phenomenon often acknowledged by those incapable of stopping. In *Reading: An Essay*, one of five small books in J. B. Priestley's Pleasures of Life series, Hugh Walpole divides readers into two general categories: the ecstatic and the critical, allowing of course for the inevitable overlap. Whether one becomes one kind of reader or the other, according to Walpole, depends on "some dominating influence" that appears in the life of every future reader, usually at the age of fourteen or fifteen, "that solves, partly, the question as to whether he will be in later life an aesthetic or unaesthetic reader."

For Walpole, it was Walter Scott's Waverley novels that sent him tumbling down the ecstatic path. He became what I. A. Richards used to call "a swoon reader." Scott did it for me, too, but he had help from Rafael Sabatini, Alexandre Dumas *père*, Victor Hugo, Robert Louis Stevenson, James Fenimore Cooper, Jules Verne, Jack London, the two Edgars—Allan Poe and Rice Burroughs—and, yes, H. C. Witwer. Fourteen seems to be a magic age for the confirmed reader. In "The Lost Childhood," his short essay on becoming a writer, Graham Greene asked:

> What do we ever get nowadays from reading to equal the excitement and the revelation in those first fourteen years? Of course I should be interested to hear that a new novel by Mr. E. M. Forster was going to appear this Spring, but I could never compare that mild expectation of civilized pleasure with the missed heartbeat, the appalled glee I felt when I found on a library shelf a novel by Rider Haggard, Percy Westerman, Captain Brereton or Stanley Weyman.

When Greene was fourteen, his library shelf delivered up Marjorie Bowen's novel *The Viper of Milan* and "for better or worse the future was struck. From that moment [he] began to write." Much as I'd like to say that *The Leather Pushers* made me into a writer, or even a golden-glove novice, I'm afraid it wouldn't be

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true. Still, I can recall the "missed heartbeat, the appalled glee" I felt when the sequel to *The Three Musketeers* fell into my clutches. To be young was bookish heaven. At fourteen I read every word of every page; I didn't know you *could* skip words. Why should I when all authors were infallible; all narrators, reliable; every detail, essential? Digressions simply did not exist. Even the famously long dissertation on the battle of Waterloo in *Les Misérables* was enthralling, as timely and material as any other scene.

And reading was fun—not serious fun, mind you, but sequestered, magical, self-absorbed fun. Nothing mattered but the story: who won, who survived, who ended up happy, who came up short. Moreover, all novels—adventure, historical, and fantasy—were on a par; all were equally good. If someone had told me then that the books featuring Tarzan, Scaramouche, the Count of Monte Cristo, Ivanhoe, Jean Valjean, Long John Silver, and Kid Roberts had been written by a single person using seven pseudonyms, I would have concurred at once.

Not that I entirely agree with Walpole. The nature of reading is less definitive than Walpole claims for it. Sure, there are swoon readers, but the swooning is modulated by the years. Once the young reader gets past the stage where the brain sucks in books as if they were bubbles of oxygen, he or she begins to sense that Melville is doing something different from Steinbeck, and that Dickens and Balzac resemble each other in certain respects, but not in all. As children we crossed wide-eyed and trusting into the writer's world; as adults we invite the writer into ours and hold him accountable for how he behaves there.

Walpole erred on the side of optimism, trusting too much in the ecstatic reader's resilience. Surely brevity is part of the ecstatic condition, and by omitting to put temporal brackets around ecstasy, Walpole conveniently forgot that reading evolves (devolves?) into the more or less critical. Schooling and swooning don't mesh, and once we begin to differentiate the rhetorical devices that stylistically and thematically inform different narratives, the innocence, the thrill, the trusting acceptance disappear. Replaced, to be sure, by the edifying feeling that one is learning something valuable. And of course there is pleasure to be had from analysis, but it is a more complicated pleasure than giving oneself over completely to stories. However you slice it, reading critically is a more solemn affair than reading ecstatically.

"The books one reads in childhood, and perhaps most of all bad and good bad books," George Orwell mused, "create in one's mind a sort of false map of the world, a series of fabulous countries into which one can retreat at odd moments." At fourteen I think I knew that boxing was not a happy or noble profession, but books about it did, in fact, become fabulous countries. From *The Leather Pushers* I went on to find Nat Fleischer's *Pictorial History of Boxing*, which steered me to W. C. Heinz's *Fireside Book of Boxing*, which drew me to biographies of John L. Sullivan and Joe Louis; and eventually I encountered the marvelous A. J. Liebling, and through Liebling, Pierce Egan, the first chronicler of the London Prize Ring.

Those repelled by boxing, or simply indifferent, may be surprised to learn of the vast literature devoted to it. R. A. Hartley's *History and Bibliography of Boxing Books* mentions 2100 pugilistic titles published in the English language. One finds in it such names as Thackeray, Dickens, Byron, Hazlitt, Arthur Conan Doyle, Bernard Shaw, and Arnold Bennett. American authors are represented by Jack London, Nelson Algren, James T. Farrell, Heywood Broun, Hemingway, Mailer, and Joyce Carol Oates. Witwer merits nine entries, which are immediately followed by four from P. G. Wodehouse. So many scribes of the scuffle, one ponders, so many literary eminencies drawn to the sport.

So who was H. C. Witwer? I didn't know. I didn't even know what his initials stood for, since the 1921 Grosset & Dunlap edition I now owned neglected to say. But I knew where to look. Page 290 of volume 21 of *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography* shows one column of seventy-five lines for Harry Charles Witwer—not a bad testimonial for a writer no one remembers. Of German extraction, Witwer was born in 1890 in Athens, Pennsylvania, and died thirty-nine years later in Los Angeles. A short life, but one that netted him a considerable reputation as journalist, humorist, fiction writer, and screenwriter. As a young man

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in Philadelphia, Witwer held down a bunch of odd jobs—errand boy, hotel clerk, salesman, fight manager—before landing a position with the *St. Cloud* (Florida) *Tribune.* From there he moved on to the *New York American,* the *Brooklyn Eagle,* and the *New York Sun,* for whom he covered the First World War.

"Meantime his attempts to write conventional magazine fiction in correct English were unsuccessful," moralizes *The National Cyclopaedia.* "Ordinary language failed him as an effective vehicle for his vein of humor." Indeed, had it not been for Mrs. Witwer, clearly an estimable woman and critic, *The Leather Pushers* might never have become my pugilistic Rosebud. It was she who "finally set him on the right path by suggesting that he write as he spoke," the result being an "unexampled outflow of slang stories . . . and with the first one printed he won the interest of the large American reading public which prefers its fiction in the vernacular." Just in case we didn't get it the first time: "He achieved a colossal popularity by producing on paper a manner of speaking rather than of writing." During a fifteen-year period, Witwer published four hundred stories, twenty-five screenplays, fourteen novels, and four plays. *Whew,* to use the vernacular.

When Mrs. Witwer advised her husband to write as he spoke, she was clearly giving the raspberry to Comte de Buffon's dictum that "those who write as they speak, even though they speak well, write badly." Knowing instinctively that such a rule applies less scrupulously if one speaks like a mook to begin with, Mrs. Witwer urged her husband on. A good thing, too. Witwer's prose is brisk, workmanlike, and certainly superior to that found in the story weeklies, dime novels, and hundreds of pulp magazines that catered to the tastes of a vernacular-preferring public.

> Me and Cockeyed Egan was tourin' "God's Own Country" (Russian for the West), where the natives would rather be Harold Bell Wright than be president, each with a stable of battlers, picking up *beaucoup* sugar by havin' 'em fight each other over the short routes, when Kane Halliday skidded across my path. Besides Beansy Mullen and Bearcat Reed, a coupla heavies, I had a good welter in Battlin' Lewis, and Egan had K. O. Krouse, another tough boy, which made up a set. Them last two babies mixed with each other more times a month than a chorus girl uses a telephone.

Although Witwer wrote about the sharpies, hustlers, louts, and swaggerers of the sporting world, he wrote about them with élan. Loftiness is a question more of style than of substance. And perhaps with the good Mrs. Witwer proofing the pages as they rolled off the Underwood, H. C. mined a vein of hard-boiled prose that appealed to the audience that pshawed the pulps. He wrote with a wink and a nudge, his style an implicit compact between author and reader in which each knows better than the malapropisms and solecisms that bedeck the printed page. In short, we and Witwer are in cahoots. Twain had already led the way with Tom and Huck, and if Harry Witwer is no Mark Twain, neither is he any less proficient than Damon Runyon at conjuring up an urban America that was beginning to strut its stuff in books and movies. The obvious resemblance, of course, is to his exact contemporary Ringgold Wilmer Lardner who, although a more serious and more subtle comic writer, might have no cause to resent comparison.

Having now reread *The Leather Pushers,* I am amazed at how much must have gone right by me. Who in blazes is Harold Bell Wright and why would some people rather be him than be president? (Wright was a best-selling novelist ninety years ago, author of *The Winning of Barbara Worth* and *The Shepherd of the Hills,* which romanticized the lives of country folk.) Other allusions to historical figures and events—"He won more gold and silver cups than the Crown Prince lifted from Belgium"—also could have made no sense to a fourteen-year-old. But what did it matter? The prose had verve, it had attitude. The Kid is introduced:

> This guy had been committed to college with the idea that when he'd come out he'd be at the very least a civil engineer, though most of the engineers I know learned their trade in a round-house and yard and was civil enough as far as that part of it goes. Halliday's people was supposed to have a dollar for every egg in a shad roe, and the

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> boy treated the civil engineer thing as a practical joke and college as somethin' he had been gave for Christmas to play with.

I can't say I feel a swoon coming on, but I do see how an adolescent male must have found something terrifically adult about this kind of writing. Of course, at fourteen I also thought the narrator just a means to an end, a way of getting to the real story of Kid Roberts, whose actual name is the phony-sounding Kane Halliday. The truth is that the narrator is more likable and more interesting than his high-born hitter. Kane Halliday is that stock character in popular novels of the period, "the Gentleman"—noble as the day is long, a defender of women, a dutiful son, a boon companion, and as brave a man as ever fastened on a pair of spats. In short, the Kid's a snore.

At fourteen, however, I must have admired him enormously. In fact, it says something that thirty-five years later I could be disappointed at hearing him say: "When I first went into this game, I made up my mind that under no circumstances would I ever step into a ring with a colored man. Never mind my reasons—they're ethical and my own." But the Kid does fight a black man because "a real champion should bar *no* one, whether it be a contest of brains or brawn."

A little of this kind of rhetoric goes a long way, though never toward making a character likable. Halliday sounds like a caffeinated Everett Everett Horton, but without the grace to look foolish while declaiming on this or that outrage. Witwer may have been giving his audience what it expected from someone who had all the advantages except knowing what life was all about, but the Kid's formal speech grates rather than amuses. Speaking of speaking, an irony almost too good to be true is that a few years after the novel's publication, an actual boxer appeared on the scene—Gene Tunney by name—who, tough enough to outpoint Jack Dempsey twice, resorted, especially when the press was around, to loony locutions that he regarded as college speak.

Will I now go on to read or reread Witwer's thirteen other novels, including *Fighting Back,* the sequel to *The Leather Pushers*? Probably not, though *From Baseball to Bosches* and *The Classics in Slang* make for tempting titles. My search, after all, is over. I have my book and I've read it too. And I learned something. I learned that Kid Roberts didn't actually like to fight; he fought because his father made some unsound investments and lost the family fortune. Nor, as it turns out, did Dad disapprove of his son's profession; in fact, he got a kick out of it. As for the beautiful, classy young woman, a senator's daughter, even she rooted for the big educated palooka when he stepped between the ropes. Oh, it was Yale the Kid went to, not—I mean, a heavyweight champion from Harvard? Come on.

So memory has been corrected. But there is more than a tinge of melancholy in such emendation. Neither the book nor its youthful reader exists for each other as they did on first meeting. *The Leather Pushers* is dated, long-winded, not without its dull patches. The same might be said of its middle-aged reader. But something else can be said as well. For just a few minutes while paging through the novel, I sensed through the haze of years and the intellectual veil lowered by critics and well-intentioned professors what it was like to read as if there were no tomorrow. The pure joy of reading may never be regained, but if we're lucky we can chance across one of those "good bad books" we read thirty or forty years ago and recall what it's like to be a child who reads. Such books are like old snapshots taken at the age when the baby fat is just swimming off the bone, when the personality is just beginning to acknowledge what it will find forever interesting, when the eyes begin to reveal for the first time the person who will be using them for the rest of his life.

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The 1997 Phi Beta Kappa Book Awards

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The Ralph Waldo Emerson Award

SPINOZA, LIBERALISM, AND THE QUESTION OF JEWISH IDENTITY. *By Steven B. Smith. Yale University Press. $30.*

Citation: This is a thoughtful and elegant work of scholarship with implications far beyond its straightforward title. Through his clear prose, breadth of reading, and skillfully constructed arguments, Professor Smith provokes us to think once again about familiar but critical issues such as religious tolerance, intellectual freedom, and the nature of a democratic society. Smith's book is an extended meditation on the creative possibilities inherent in an exploration of the perpetually unstable relationship between community identities based on faith and tradition, and civic identities based on law and individual autonomy. Smith's portrait of Spinoza as a politically engaged "liberated individual," one who was willing to sacrifice personal ambitions and personal happiness in order to maintain his personal integrity, should have profound resonance for those of us living in the glory days of the American democratic empire.

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Woman of Letters

REBECCA PEPPER SINKLER

M. F. K. Fisher: A Life in Letters: Correspondence 1929–1991. *Selected by Norah K. Barr, Marsha Moran, and Patrick Moran. Counterpoint.* $35.

"I am as obviously a letter writer as some people are alcoholics or Benzedrine boys," M. F. K. Fisher wrote at the age of forty. The wry, self-deprecatory tone of that admission will be familiar to followers of Fisher's long, productive career as a writer. They will take her at her word. Newcomers to her work need only this collection of correspondence as proof that she was, indeed, a woman of letters. If you did not sense her looking over your shoulder, you would be tempted, even, to raise that to a Woman of Letters.

But it is certain that Fisher herself would deny any hint that she was some twentieth-century female version of those Victorian literary lions who mastered all forms and promoted their opinions on everything from world historical events to personal conduct and aesthetics. To the contrary, she always resisted attempts by her admirers to monumentalize her. (Well, almost always; as an old woman, she did get a kick out of being designated an "honorary Armenian.")

By many measures, Fisher would qualify for the grand literary distinction. At some point in her eighty-three years she tried almost every literary form: essays, book reviews, travel pieces, novels, short stories. She anthologized the work of others, translated articles and books, and contributed essays and articles to serious magazines. She even edited a newspaper. She also mastered a few forms that would make a real Man of Letters blush, including cookbooks and articles on food and child care. Some of these genres were not, perhaps, literature, but she wrote everything with inimitable style and flair.

Rebecca Pepper Sinkler is the former editor of the *New York Times Book Review*. She is writing a book based on her family's memoirs.

That style is always intimate but never coy; it is elliptical, digressive, witty, fresh, tactile, and bursting with energy. "The need to use words and direct them to a chosen person is almost physically urgent in me," she explains to her sister Norah. She began to respond to that need as a child and continued almost until her death in 1992. I can think of no better way to find a voice or hone a style than through the daily practice of a wide and richly varied correspondence. Fisher cultivated an epistolary garden of family, friends, lovers, and peers that continued to expand, even in old age, and that, in turn, extended her ties to the world at a stage in life when most people, from exhaustion or fear, are drawing inward in increasingly small circles. As an example of what an abidingly open mind can encompass even in the face of persistent pain and the apprehension of death, *A Life in Letters* has much to teach us.

Fisher seems to have been born without a gene for conformity. Her life accommodated both her firm roots in her native California soil and her lust for foreign flavors. Born in 1908 into a long line of newspaper people, she was transplanted from Michigan at the age of four to the Quaker town of Whittier, California, where she soon learned what it was to be an outsider. The "friends" in her autobiographical essay collection *Among Friends* looked askance at her family, and their children, taking young Mary Frances for an Irish Catholic, made life accordingly rough on her. She considered their taunts more ritualistic than personal.

This refusal of victimhood sprang, I am sure, from what she would later call "my inner jaunty detachment." Fisher had an almost aristocratic sense of self. That is not to say that she was a snob—anything but. Her friend-

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ships transcended class, age, race—most of the categories that *can* define and narrow our range of relationships. But she had a natural authority, testimony to an innate self-confidence.

Part of her self-assurance may be attributed to the fact that she was a beautiful woman, though unconventionally so. With her dark eyebrows, boyishly cropped hair, and sensual mouth, she must have cut an exotic figure when, at twenty-one, she married Al Fisher, a pompous, repressed, perhaps latently gay English professor and poet manqué. Though the marriage failed early, it provided one enormous benefit: Fisher's first brush with France, which developed into a lifelong love affair. Al and Mary Frances lived in Dijon, while he worked on his dissertation and she awakened to her new life. She kept house, learned French, undertook gastronomic pilgrimages, and marveled at, among other things, the French capacity for conversation. "After a tea or dinner with French people you feel so excited and wide-awake that it's a matter of hours to quiet down to your usual state of stupidity," she wrote home.

Much of the early life we learn from letters saved by her mother, Edith Holbrooke Kennedy, her sisters Norah and Anne, and Lawrence Clark Powell, a writer and a librarian at the University of California. Reading between the lines, you suspect that Powell and she enjoyed a lifelong ardor for one another. Powell saved every letter M. F. K. wrote to him. (We don't see the other side of the correspondence, alas.) It seems clear that their relationship had something to do with the breakup of the Fisher marriage. Powell lifts the veil discreetly in his introduction to this volume, remembering the last time he saw Fisher, in her bedroom, where she had hung a print of Venus that he had given her decades earlier. "Venus surely did rise from the sea for us," she reminded him with a smile—surely a reference to more than a meeting of the minds.

Indeed, Venus rose early and often for Fisher. M. F. K. was equipped with a healthy sexual appetite, and, while often without a man, admits regularly to "sexual longings" and to their sublimation in work. "Once I told you that writing was for me (is?) a form of making love. I have nobody to make love to," she confesses to a psychiatrist she formerly consulted. "Perhaps I should invent a lover, as some children do an imaginary playmate!" None of her letters are sexually explicit, but many, like that one, carry a sexual message and admit to a strong physical attraction. Unlike many people, she knows the price of unfulfilled appetites. "Sexually I am in a deep freeze, a deliberate and costly accomplishment," she writes an old friend at mid-life. And when love surfaces again for her in later life, she greets it ecstatically: "I am like the old woman in the Provençal Christmas pageant, with my hands frozen upward in a gesture of pure astonishment, that you are in love with me," she writes to a lover.

One would give anything to read her letters to the great love of her life, Dillwyn Parrish. Fisher and Parrish, a painter, met in California and, after Mary Frances was divorced, they quickly married. What those letters would say about this grand and selfless passion one can only guess. We witness it only secondhand, in letters home, mostly. After one idyllic and creatively productive year living in Vevey, Switzerland, Parrish was struck with an embolism in his leg. His long, agonized decline is documented in her memoir *Stay Me, O Comfort Me*, and fleshed out in its reality in letters from this period.

Oddly, the miseries of her husband's condition are far outweighed by the sense of love and joy that Fisher experiences as she suffers with him. We witness her ability to live in the moment, whatever that moment seems to hold. From a grim hospital waiting room, for instance, she can be transported by a freak burst of music. She writes to the Kennedy family:

> There is a carillon on top of the clinic, which is silent at night but rings out a pretty off-key bar or two of a hymn every hour of the day. But yesterday about five o'clock it suddenly broke loose with several Schubert songs, Rachmaninov's Prelude in-whatever-key-it is, "Flow Gently, Sweet Afton" played like a Bach fugue, part of Dvorák's New World Symphony and a few other such things—and it was actually beautiful, in key and with chords of many bells at once, and

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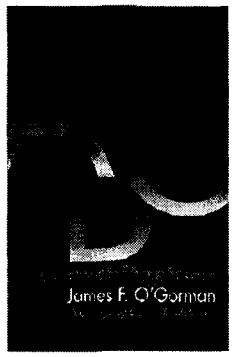

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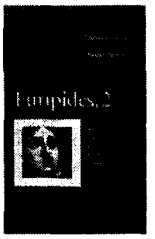

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> as many modulations as a fine organ. I looked out the window, and people down in the streets were stopped, puzzled and excited. I think it must have been some famous carilloneur, maybe from Belgium, who is here to get his gizzard fixed and simply broke loose for a while. Whatever it was, it was certainly swinging those bells around.

Repeated amputations and a hopeless quest for treatment or drugs that might assuage his pain eventually overtook Parrish's capacity for endurance, and he committed suicide in 1941. Interestingly, it is only in a letter decades later that Fisher refers to the fact. Perhaps she was simply incapable at the time of handling his abandonment, no matter how understandable its cause. It would be helpful to know if there are letters not included here about Parrish's suicide, and that of her brother a year later. Surely the writer's impulse must have been urgent in the face of tragedy.

The letters here seem a representative sample, well chosen and usually well annotated by Fisher's younger sister, Norah Barr, by her secretary Marsha Moran, and by her friend Patrick Moran. The notes that introduce each section give a cursory biographical framework, but one wishes for more discussion of the editors' selective principle and more clarity about the missing facts.

What, for instance, drove Fisher, within two years of Patrick's death, to conceive and bear a child—and with whom? Uncharacteristically for such a nonconformist, she intended to pass off the child as adopted. Perhaps only Mary Frances knew the paternity of her firstborn, but, again, it would shed light on her personality to know the basis of her radical decision to become a mother and whether she kept the secret to herself or shared it with anyone.

Such secrecy is almost incredible in light of her habitual honesty. She is remarkably perceptive about herself and unafraid of the uglier aspects of her personality. She writes eloquently here, and in her memoirs, of the horrors of caring for her dying father. Forced to depend on his support after the collapse of her third marriage, to Donald Friede, she returned with two young daughters to his ranch and nursed him through an ugly, raging death. She is no angel at the hearth; the situation arouses in her a full range of negative emotions and neuroses—"panic, apprehension, shakes"—which she expresses forthrightly.

Likewise, she can rip into a lover or friend with abandon and a measure of self-righteousness that suggests what a demanding presence she must have been. Her criticism of the memoir her friend Lawrence Powell wrote of his parents is scathing: "Thanks for the proof that you have made your final payment to your filial duties. I hope you feel fine about it. I wonder if your mother did as much white-washing in her memoirs as you did in your payments to both parents."

More often, the object of her criticism is her own writing. Along with a procrastinator's tic that leads her to begin almost every letter with apologies for its lateness, she repeatedly refuses to be cast as an authority on her craft. When asked to run a writer's conference, she protests to her editor, "I honestly believe that everything I know about the writing of nonfiction could be written on the head of a pin with a garden hoe."

Though this smacks of false modesty, in the context of Fisher's body of work it sounds more to me like that jaunty inner detachment surfacing again. At some deep level, one feels, there are things more important to Fisher than professional acclaim. To her late-life lover, Arnold Gingrich, the editor of *Esquire*, she wrote, "You at least care very much about being a 'writer.' I do not. . . . D[onald] F[riede] married me partly to be the husband of a fantastically successful female. When he found I wanted only to be successful as a female, he developed psychogenic stomach pains."

Did she fully achieve "female success"? That depends on how we define it. In conventional terms, failed marriages, a child out of wedlock, and an old age lived alone are hardly tokens of ideal womanhood. On the other hand, she spent most of her life in the conventional womanly role of nurturer. And the works we know her best for are the cookbooks and gastronomical writings. What more traditional female subjects are there? Writing to her editor Judith Jones about a proposed

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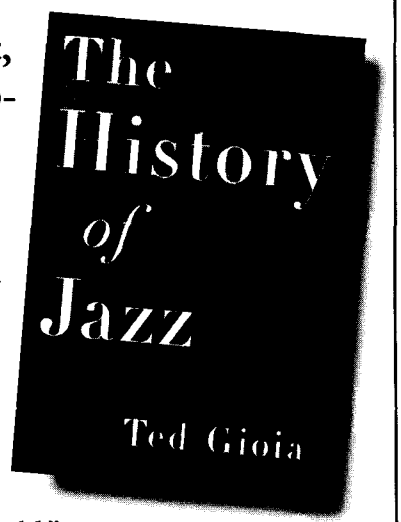

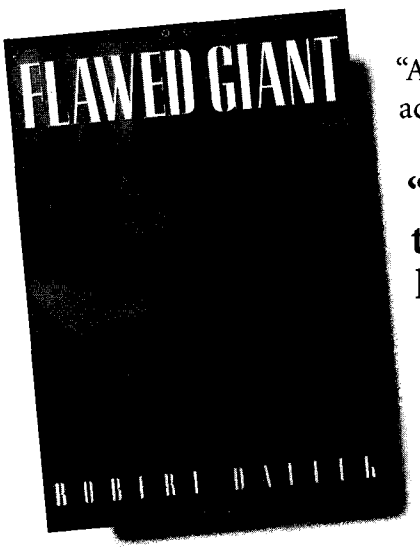

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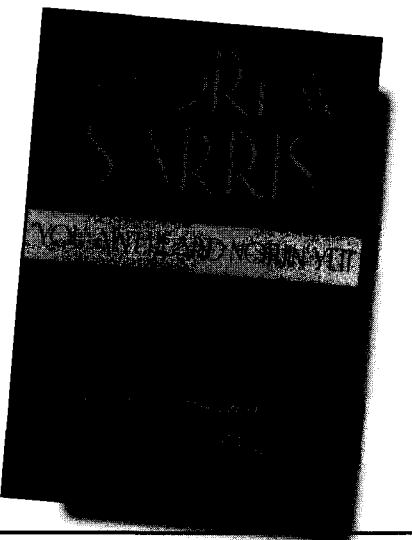

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Fisher "Reader," she summarizes briskly, "It could be about food or traveling or old age or sex or children or or or."

But there was nothing conventionally nice about Fisher's output: the sheer volume of correspondence has near superhuman dimensions. Here is a woman who nursed her parents, cared for her younger siblings, raised two children alone and with no secure income, traveled extensively, opened her house to friends and strays, and cooked like a woman possessed. Where did she get the time, and where the energy?

Which one of us could not accomplish miracles, if only we didn't waste all that time every night sleeping? Fisher seems to have gotten around that: "I get a lot of work done while asleep . . . take care of professional problems, work out solutions, rewrite with success, discover truer ways to live with people . . . all interesting but tiring at times." I should say. Even when she is hopelessly blocked, she can rely on her nocturnal muse. "My subconscious or unconscious or whatever it would be, however, is working overtime and increasingly I write all night while I sleep," she confides to her psychiatrist.

At the very end we watch as her strength fails her. Parkinson's disease slowly destroys her speaking voice and her ability to use her hands. Bedridden and weak, she still finds the energy to write. "It's frustrating, for me, because my mind is still very full of words and how best to use them. This is an age-old preoccupation with me," she confides to a young friend and writer in a letter in which she also passes on encouragement and promises to write "something" about his work to help him.

Yes, M. F. K. Fisher was to a degree engaged in the great world of letters, as an opinion maker and as a promoter of talents and careers. But what motivated her to the end was the personal, not the public: to her oldest friend, Lawrence Powell, she vows: "You keep writing to me and I will to you, I promise, as long as I live." She did, of course, responding as ever to that "need to use words and direct them to a chosen person," as urgent as it had been when she was a girl—the one great formative drive in a long, rich, remarkable life.

Triumph of the Source

THE FOOTNOTE: A CURIOUS HISTORY. *By Anthony Grafton. Harvard University Press.* $25.

Reviewed by STEVEN OZMENT

In a recent review of a book of my own, the critic alleged that the author had been "deceitful." The text, she complained, read like a novel but then, at story's end, confronted her with 470 notes! Had the critic first read Anthony Grafton's *The Footnote: A Curious History*, she would have discovered that the function of foot- or endnotes is actually to *reassure* the reader. Notes are there, first, to make clear that a work of history is not spun solely out of the author's head but is based on real events recorded in surviving documents and sources. Notes also console the reader by demonstrating the breadth of the author's learning and the extent of his toil. Among scholars, notes give a subject its gravitas. Whereas the text, the more finished part of a study, possesses a certain serenity and finality, the notes trace the ordeal of labor and birth.

Where did this potent, complex little creature come from? According to Mr. Grafton, the footnote's paternity is ancient and its lineage varied. It is the argument of his book, however, that there is a definite point in time when footnotes and related critical and documentary appendices attained a level of sophistication that distinguishes historical modernity from tradition. It will come as no surprise to readers familiar with the academic mind that that point is the author's own period of specialization: the seventeenth century.

Grafton begins his search with what prove to be two straw men: the nineteenth-century German historian Leopold von Ranke and the late-eighteenth-century English historian Edward Gibbon, who share the reputation of having perfected modern historical scholarship. Despite Ranke's impressive combina-

Steven Ozment is the McLean Professor of Ancient and Modern History at Harvard. His most recent book is *The Burgermeister's Daughter: Scandal in a Sixteenth-Century German Town*.

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tion of narrative and analytical history and Gibbon's blending of massive knowledge and high style, neither, according to Grafton, was the first to practice the art and craft of documented, critical history. Behind both were ancient, medieval, and Renaissance prototypes, numerous historians who not only told stories but cited evidence as well. Among them were the Italians Bernardino Corio, Leonardo Bruni, and Giannantonio Campano; the Englishmen Richard White and Ben Jonson; and, most impressively, the great French historian Jacques-Auguste de Thou. The latter wrote a "genuinely new kind of history" in what would prove to be the longest historical narrative before the twentieth century.

Other prototypes of modern scholarship included seventeenth-century church historians and antiquaries, particularly the German Jesuit Athanasius Kircher, whose massive, illustrated study of ancient China marked the maturation of a tradition of historical documentation reaching all the way back to the fourth-century Christian historian Eusebius and the venerable eighth-century English monk known as Bede. Here, too, one can find a combination of technical argument and deep documentation that anticipates modern historical scholarship. Also helping to make the primary source supreme within this tradition of scholarship were the bitter tracts of warring Protestants and Catholics.

The seventeenth century was nonetheless a step up in historical scholarship because that century's church historians and antiquaries, as well as exceptional scholars like de Thou, subjected documents to a higher degree of scrutiny, allowing "the [prior] age of primitive accumulation of ecclesiastical-learning . . . to give way to one of analysis and investment." However, Mr. Grafton again insists that the work of these scholars also provides an "insufficient" explanation for the rise of the footnote.

So who, or what, in the end was the key player in the birth of the new professional scholarship the footnote came to represent? For Grafton, that honor belongs to a scholar and a work he first discovered as a college undergraduate: the great *Dictionnaire* of Pierre Bayle. "Swarming" with footnotes and irreverencies, and aspiring to expose and correct all the mistakes then existing in other reference books, Bayle's dictionary is truly a

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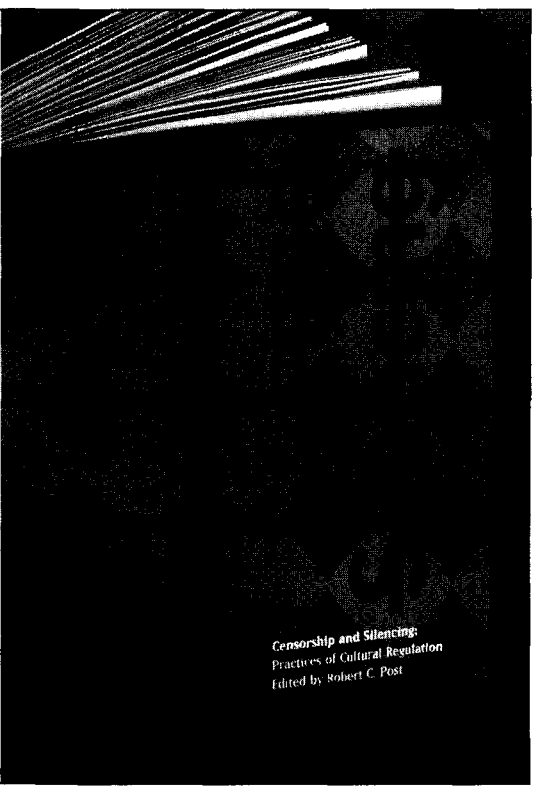

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young man's book. It was written against the background of the "deconstruction" of the scientific authority of the ancients at the hands of the new seventeenth-century scientists René Descartes, Francis Bacon, Blaise Pascal, and Robert Boyle. Here the modern "rules of scholarly procedure" and historical scholarship as we know them today find their definitive statement.

Although Grafton proclaims Bayle's uniqueness, he diminishes it somewhat by his extensive honor roll of earlier prototypes and by the revelation that Bayle was not, as the Germans like to say, always *sauber* ("he silently abridged and consciously or unconsciously misread texts"). So, in the end, the hero of Grafton's story turns out to be far from indisputable.

If there is a failing in this very ambitious and informative little book, it is the absence of a discussion of what the "rise of the footnote" or modern scholarship has meant for the reading public outside the academy. Grafton writes about a very comfortable scholarly world that he obviously loves. The only discordant note he finds is arguably one only a scholar in such a position would take notice of and lament: the footnote's "stylistic decline to a list of highly abbreviated archival citations."

A more interesting question is how the footnote has affected the scholars it obsesses. Is it also the source of inaccessible scholarship and academic cliques—networks of scholars who write primarily to and for themselves, aloof from the general, educated public? Has the rise of the footnote contributed to that historical illiteracy and denial now rampant in many of our schools and universities? Could it be the footnote that has enabled so many scholars to walk away from their pedagogical responsibility to inform and enlighten their fellow citizens? There may be a larger, less abstract, and more important story still to be told about the modern footnote.

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Reviewed by **ROSEMARY L. BRAY**

The Library of America has issued a two-volume set of the works of James Baldwin, edited by Toni Morrison. Their appearance makes clear a fact little understood: Baldwin, as a social commentator, remains one of America's most unappreciated prophets. From his earliest essays and book reviews in magazines and journals such as the *Partisan Review*, *Harper's*, and the *New Leader*, Baldwin's taut, ironic clarity was a brisk breeze blowing through the literary world. His autobiographical novel, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, published in 1953, painted a searing portrait of the claustrophobic worlds of fundamentalist religion, the post–World War II ghettos of African-Americans, the black family—indeed, the weight of history itself.

Baldwin's first book garnered significant praise, a harbinger, he hoped, of his future as a major American novelist. But that was never to be. With the 1955 publication of *Notes of a Native Son*, a collection of his early essays and reviews, Baldwin more fully revealed himself as the incisive, elegant essayist he would become. To be sure, this first collection was uneven—from the awkward self-consciousness of "Autobiographical Notes," to the bitter challenge to Richard Wright in "Everybody's Protest Novel" and "Many Thousands Gone." But what would linger for readers was the clear, pitiless vision of America's racial nightmare that Baldwin delineated with such precision.

In assuming the voice of an "objective" white American gazing at black Americans, Baldwin ran the risk of alienating the very

Rosemary L. Bray is the author of *Unafraid of the Dark*, a memoir recently published by Random House.

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people he hoped to represent. At the same time, he endeared himself to whites, who found in this literary device a safe space from which to regard the "Negro Problem." "Time has made some changes in the Negro face," he wrote in his essay "Many Thousands Gone." "Nothing has succeeded in making it exactly like our own, though the general desire seems to be to make it blank if one cannot make it white. When it has become blank, the past as thoroughly washed from the black face as it has been from ours, our guilt will be finished—at least it will have ceased to be visible, which we imagine to be much the same thing."

In some ways, the success of this early book was an old story—the often condescending acclaim of white readers amazed that someone black might function with authority and power in the territory of the mind (an attitude, sad to say, not limited to the mid-1950s). In truth, Baldwin not only functioned in such territory, he occupied it with enviable vigor and grace. His distracting affectation of a white persona notwithstanding, it is still a delight to read a writer who, more than forty years ago, put his finger on the pulse of our unresolved dilemma. In an era that has declared the end of racism, rereading Baldwin, following his merciless gaze across the American landscape, realizing how much has changed and how much has not, is a curious act of renewal.

It is a merciless gaze that continued through his subsequent essays, including "Nobody Knows My Name" (1961) and, most important, *The Fire Next Time* (1963), part manifesto, part plea, wholly American, and unforgettable. No African-American parents should fail to reread "My Dungeon Shook: Letter to My Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation" and then save it for their children, to be read, I should think, at puberty. In that essay he wrote: "You were born into a society which spelled out with brutal clarity, and in as many ways as possible, that you were a worthless human being. . . . The details and symbols of your life have been deliberately constructed to make you believe what white people say about you. Please try to remember that what they believe, as well as what they do and cause you to endure, does not testify to your inferiority but to their inhumanity and fear."

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Without Baldwin's voice to remind us, some of us might, in these waning days of the so-called American Century, believe that we had gone crazy, that the vast wasted space between black and white America was an illusion or an unrelinquished grudge. But in later, previously uncollected essays such as "The White Man's Guilt," Baldwin delineated the racial gulf we have always preferred to ignore:

> [White Americans] are dimly, or vividly, aware that the history they have fed themselves is mainly a lie, but they do not know how to release themselves from it and they suffer enormously from the resulting personal incoherence . . . heard nowhere more plainly than in those stammering, terrified dialogues with . . . the black man in America . . . : Do not blame me, I was not there. I did not do it. My history has nothing to do with Europe or the slave trade. Anyway, it was your chiefs who sold you to me. . . . But on the same day, in another gathering, and in the most private chamber of his heart, always, the white American remains proud of that history for which he does not wish to pay, and from which, materially, he has profited so much.

It would grieve Baldwin, who died in 1987, to discover that he is remembered primarily as one of the greatest essayists this country has produced. His heart belonged to fiction. To be sure, there is power in his novels and stories, rooted in the same bravery and clarity that distinguish his nonfiction. Included here are *Giovanni's Room*, the 1956 novel about a bisexual love affair, as well as *Another Country* (1962) and a collection of stories, *Going to Meet the Man* (1965). If his nonfiction work was strongest in its examination of race, Baldwin's fiction was marked by a deep hunger to dissect the complex patterns woven by race, gender, and sexuality. In some ways, that hunger was ahead of its time, perhaps even ahead of Baldwin's understanding.

"All of the American categories of male and female, straight or not, black or white, were shattered . . . very early in my life," he wrote in the 1985 essay "Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood." Yet if there is a pattern to be found among Baldwin's less than successful work, it can be found in his adherence to category where women are concerned. The clarity of vision that makes his work so arresting when he writes about race, about history, about men seems to fail him when he portrays women in these early novels. Elizabeth and Florence in *Go Tell It on the Mountain*; Ida Scott, Cass Silenski, and Leona in *Another Country*—all find themselves altered or destroyed by love or the bitterness that follows in love's wake. Not for these women the desperate strivings of self-definition to be found in male counterparts like John Grimes or Rufus Scott. The conflicts that Baldwin articulated with such brilliance are strictly male in their understanding.

To be fair, Baldwin was right to see and to speak on the hazards of being black and male in a society that hated and stereotyped any such linkage. But in the matter of black women's lives, dreams, and sensibilities, he seems frozen in amber. (There has been, from time to time, speculation that Baldwin's homosexuality was responsible for such an overweening male focus in his work. But that seems nonsensical, even a trifle homophobic. Bookstore shelves are filled with undeveloped female characters written by heterosexual men. So what's their excuse?) In fact, Baldwin's characterizations of women did become more holistic in his later fiction, such as *If Beale Street Could Talk*, but the women never attained the vibrant life and nuance of his male characters. In the end, it was his understanding of race in America that would mark him forever as one of the most important writers this country has produced.

In these days of banned books and lowered educational expectations, it would be too much to hope that James Baldwin's work might become required reading, that people could never consider themselves well educated until they could discuss his precise, eloquent, often tragic vision of American life. But if we were that thoughtful a nation, Baldwin's work might not have been necessary at all. As it is, his voice is perhaps more vital to our nation's health than we know. This Library of America edition restores him to our consciousness.

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The Voice Behind the Curtain

A Director Calls: Stephen Daldry and the Theatre

By Wendy Lesser. University of California Press. $40. Paper, $14.95.

Reviewed by MICHAEL UPCHURCH

"It rains onstage—and the house falls apart."

That was the advance word on British director Stephen Daldry's production of J. B. Priestley's *An Inspector Calls* before it toured the United States in 1996. And it was true: the rain came down and the house literally fell to pieces. Not that this helped matters.

I happened to catch the play in Lexington, Kentucky, in a road-show production helmed by American director Julian Webber—very much in accord with Daldry's specifications—and it seemed an absurdly overblown treatment of a creaky, message-minded script. (The plot concerns the suicide of a working-class woman whom the middle-class protagonists have all encountered in one damaging capacity or another.) The message was laudable if obvious: that we should weigh the effect of our actions on the lives of others. The performances were adequate, if a tad shrill. And it was a great relief not to have an Andrew Lloyd Webber score accompanying the dazzling stage effects. Still, the questions I went home with were damning: Why this play? And why such an outlandish treatment of it?

Wendy Lesser, who takes *Inspector* as the starting point of her engaging examination of Stephen Daldry's career, clearly thinks highly of her subject. Yet as much as she admires him, he emerges more as a test case for her than as the actual subject of *A Director Calls.* Indeed, he serves mostly as an excuse for Lesser to investigate the larger matters that concern her: the role of individual talent in the collaborative arts, the barriers and links between stage world and outside world, the uses of artifice in illuminating various truths,

Michael Upchurch is a Seattle novelist (*The Flame Forest, Passive Intruder*) who occasionally reviews theater.

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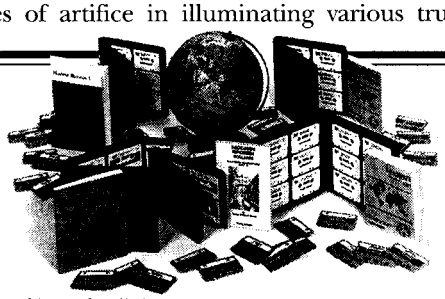

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the inevitable tension (or harmony) between playwright's voice and director's voice.

Wendy Lesser, who is the editor of the *Threepenny Review*, also vividly conveys the daily rhythms of Daldry's work life and that of his collaborators. She scrutinizes the influence of audiences and critics on theater craft, and she notes, too, the danger of artistic talent being siphoned off into administrative duties. (Daldry, as artistic director of London's Royal Court Theatre, is instrumental to its fundraising efforts and building renovation—and he's directing far less frequently than he once did.) Best of all, Lesser is exceptionally alert to the protean nature of what occurs onstage and to how suddenly and drastically a production can metamorphose from one shape or mood to another before achieving a relatively stable final incarnation.

In short, even if you thought Daldry's *Inspector* more a miscalculation than a masterpiece, there is good reason to read Lesser's reflections about him and to savor her insights on the nature and workings of theater.

What drew Lesser to *Inspector?* This is how she puts it:

> Sitting there in the theatre, I knew only that I was being spoken to, in and through this play, by a voice I understood. It was a voice that spoke to me about the function of theatre as art, as entertainment, and as political exhortation; it spoke about the relationship between the world onstage and the world outside the theatre; and it spoke about how music, language, lighting, sets, and acting could all work together to produce a specific mood.

She then expands:

> Yes, I agreed with Daldry's [leftist] politics, and yes, I felt he treated the playwright well, but I also loved the production because it was so much fun. Stephen Daldry . . . had managed to take a relatively serious, extremely admonitory play like *An Inspector Calls* and give it the thrill and glamour of spectacle.

Lesser went on to see *Inspector* and other Daldry productions numerous times, "watching scene rehearsals, dress rehearsals, previews, and performances, fragments as well as wholes, discarded versions as well as final ones." She made a point of watching each show from various points in the theater—balcony, stalls, aisle seat, center row. Although she conducted a number of interviews, most of her research was more informal. Eavesdropping, she says, was "the central technique of this book." Employing these methods, she escapes the usual shackles of theater criticism—for as she rightly notes, "Theatre reviewing, which routinely requires a critic to deliver an instantaneous judgment after seeing a play only once, is an inherently self-defeating task." In lingering over the crafting of deliberate stage effects—not just rain and exploding houses, but lighting, musical cues, dialogue delivery, and choreography—she goes a long way toward making the reader aware of the pragmatic building blocks upon which subliminally registered stage effects are constructed.

Some stage effects, of course, are less subliminal than brazenly expressionistic—witness Daldry's use of set design. In the case of *Inspector,* the designer happened to be Daldry's lover and frequent collaborator Ian MacNeil, who reveals to Lesser that the disintegrating house was Daldry's idea. He remarks, "I thought it was vulgar at first, but it works," and in what almost seems a running gag, he later comments, "Before I met [Daldry] my work was pretty static. I wasn't into sets that did things." Daldry's own take on their team efforts makes still more clear the mutual violation of individual sensibilities that collaboration can involve: "When we work together on a show . . . it's not just 'Let's do a show,' it's 'Let's tear the relationship apart and rebuild it while we do a show.' If it works, it's fantastic. If it goes wrong, it's awful."

Even when rehearsal relationships are strictly professional, Lesser sees personal tensions shaping onstage invention. In a production of Ron Hutchinson's *Rat in the Skull*—about the interrogation of an IRA terrorist—Daldry found himself getting a recalcitrant response from Tony Doyle, an actor of Irish Catholic background playing a Royal Ulster Constabulary detective-inspector. As Lesser sees it, Doyle was "an Irishman standing up against an Englishman's opinions about the national-

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ist struggle, and he was a Catholic who, though he was playing a Protestant in the play, still couldn't bring himself to credit the Protestant point of view. . . . He was also an explicitly heterosexual man resisting what may have struck him as an implicitly homosexual interpretation [of a fight scene in the play]. He was an older man defying the younger man who had been placed in a position of authority over him, and he was an actor standing up for his artistic rights against the opposing guild of directors." The process by which Doyle's performance became distinctively his own within Daldry's framework makes for compelling reading.

When Lesser sticks closely to production histories and Daldry's relations with his colleagues, her book is almost a page-turner, carrying its intricate analyses and finely shaded observations with admirable swiftness and ease. Daldry's voice, his warm mercurial presence, his willingness to let the best idea win even if it's not his own—all come alive in Lesser's hands. One sometimes glimpses another level of involvement with Daldry, whether personally or professionally, that has to do with his sexual or leadership aura, and while Lesser briefly dwells on his powers of seduction, she could have taken this further. Still, her shrewd account of rehearsal-hall struggles, especially in her chapter on *Rat in the Skull,* feels remarkably complete and suggestive as well of some central truths about actor-director symbiosis.

Less satisfying is her blasé acceptance of the central Daldry paradox: that he's a self-proclaimed "old lefty" using an exorbitantly pricey medium to get his points across. Lesser, instead, waxes enthusiastic about his marrying "the dramaturgical techniques of 'poor' theatre . . . with the magnificence of operatic display." She even seems to see high ticket prices as integral to the aesthetic experience Daldry offers. So much for a theater of the people.

To supplement her arguments, she draws on a range of philosophical and theater-theory writings by J. L. Austin, Bertolt Brecht, Stanley Cavell, Erving Goffman, and others, sometimes finding illuminating gems there and sometimes finding prose far more murky and pretentious than any she's capable of

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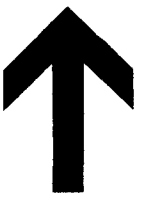

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writing. At her worst, when she stumbles, she grows a little too excited about the "uncanny" affinities she sees between, say, the closing passages of Samuel Beckett's mini-novel, *The Lost Ones,* and Ian MacNeil's set design for Meredith Oakes's *The Editing Process,* or between a descriptive passage from a Seamus Heaney essay on Irish identity and the stage setup for *Rat in the Skull.* With the latter, she at least sticks within the parameters of Ireland, though her point seems more specious than convincing.

These are quibbles, however. The considerable achievement of *A Director Calls* is the portrait it draws of a director's work, an activity perhaps more titillating than is generally acknowledged. Julian Webber, the director who took over the touring production of *An Inspector Calls* from Daldry, says it best: "The thing about directing is, it's like sex. . . . You know other people do it, but you don't know how they do it."

Lesser, gifted eavesdropper that she is, tells you exactly how, and serves up keen insights on the meaning and power of performance while she's at it.

The Art of Respectability

PLEASURE WARS
By Peter Gay. Norton. $29.95.

Reviewed by **NINA AUERBACH**

On the jacket of this fifth and final volume of Peter Gay's *The Bourgeois Experience: From Victoria to Freud,* the publisher assures us that: "No one reading this concluding volume of Peter Gay's magnificent revaluation of the nineteenth century will ever again use the term Victorian as a synonym for dull." Since I am one of the many who never did use the term Victorian as a synonym for dull, but who see, as Peter Gay does, conflict and passionate resistance within the once popular image of complacent Victorianism, I have never been thunderstruck by the originality of Gay's mission: to restore emotional and erotic depth to the despised Victorian middle class. I do, however, admire the vigor and style with which these five volumes demonstrate the complexity of an age whose complexity has long been widely appreciated.

This final volume is less racy than *Education of the Senses,* the well-known opening of the series, which reveled, like its Victorians, in sexual joy and the anatomy of love. It is also less well focused than the earlier volumes and less attuned to the inner lives of its bourgeois subjects. This loss of argumentative point and depth of perspective may be a symptom of authorial weariness, or it may be inherent in a subject about which we have always been more reticent than we are about sex: the love of art.

Perhaps because patronage is a worthy but not inspiring enterprise, *Pleasure Wars* is more energetic in attack than defense. Its primary targets are the angry artists whom Gay labels "bourgeoisphobes," those who, like Flaubert, subjected the poor middle class to "strident," "tendentious," and indiscriminate invective. Gay responds to Flaubert's sweeping accusations by offering brief accounts of art-friendly bourgeois—not the controversial aesthetes, whom he pretty much ignores, but respectable patrons and the founders of Europe's great museums. Along the way, he brands Flaubert and, by implication, Flaubert's allies, with Freudian diagnoses: "A psychoanalyst would rightly point to all this unrelieved, emotion-ridden bluster as a sign of some inner maladjustment." A non-psychoanalyst might accuse Gay of fighting caricature with caricature.

Of course Gay is rational and right: throughout nineteenth-century Europe, some members of the middle classes furthered the progress of art, even, as Gay argues in a final chapter, the controversial development of modernism. In fact, Gay could make a stronger case than he does. The Victorian novel, especially but not exclusively in England, was in essence collaborative. These great teeming

Nina Auerbach, John Walsh Centennial Professor of English at the University of Pennsylvania, has written widely about Victorian literature and culture. Her books include *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth* and *Private Theatricals: The Lives of the Victorians.*

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creations were shaped by the clamorous responsiveness of their largely middle-class audience, not by solitary, estranged artists. Gay might also have discussed the symbiosis between the Pre-Raphaelite painters and their avid patrons in England's northern cities, for without these supposedly Philistine industrialists, the luscious dream worlds of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Holman Hunt, and Edward Burne-Jones would have found no institutional homes. Gay takes all of Europe as his province and extends his range well into the twentieth century, thereby, I think, cluttering his canvas and diluting his analysis.

Culture Wars relies on thumbnail sketches of patrons and art lovers from a wide range of countries and decades. It ignores the virulence of Philistinism (or "Podsnappery," as Dickens dubbed it); the only invective it quotes comes from bourgeoisphobes. Moreover, Gay's method, and his broad canvas, demand that when he talks about artists he dwells on art, but when he turns to bourgeois patrons, he dwells on money. There is a chapter on the prices of paintings and reproductions, but this informative material does not persuade us that those who did buy art loved it as much as Mabel Loomis Todd loved sex. Gay's extended analysis of Todd's yummy journal in *Education of the Senses* gives way to account books. We know what art cost, but we never enter the lives it fertilized and expanded.

The most successful chapter, in my opinion, is the unusually protracted analysis of two nineteenth-century cities: Manchester and Munich. Here Gay gives himself space to consider his material in depth, to define contrasts rather than lumping different countries and times together, to show the concrete achievements (and limitations) of middle-class citizens.

Manchester, one of the earliest fully industrial Victorian cities, was, in reformist polemic, the equivalent of Hell, but the determination of leading citizens transformed it into a democratic center of affordable culture. An orchestra, a Gothic town hall, a public library, the *Guardian*, and the Whitworth Art Gallery made Manchester what it still is, one of the loveliest and liveliest cities in England. By contrast to this stirring account of civic transformation, the middle class of Victo-

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rian Munich alternately toadied to and tried vainly to deflect the imperial bombast and Wagnerian obsessions of a series of megalomaniacal emperors. Two contrasting memorials conclude Gay's tale of two cities:

> When in 1826 the cornerstone was laid for the Alte Pinakothek in Munich . . . a nearby copper plaque listed the principal collections to be housed in this temple to culture, complete with a dedication both obsequious and accurate: "Bavaria owes the building and its art treasures to the noble disposition of its rulers, the house of Wittelsbach." Some six decades later, in 1885, the founders of the Birmingham Art Gallery formulated the Manchester way to culture very differently: "By the gains of Industry," reads their plaque, "we promote Art."

This tale of culture's dependence on power politics is historical narrative of a high order.

But even in this telling chapter, Gay attenuates his rich material by eliding the role of the Jews who were prominent in Manchester's cultural crusades, but who were excluded from Munich's. Throughout *Pleasure Wars*, middle-class Jews are outspoken and enthusiastic cultural patrons. Only a handful of non-artists were loyal to Oscar Wilde after his trials, but a majority of these were Jewish. So much has been written about Wilde lately that Gay's re-telling of his fall seems hasty and superficial. Characteristically, it dwells optimistically on Wilde's few champions, not on the venom and violence of the respectable majority. Gay is equally misleading about middle-class support of modernist art. In the twentieth century, the Jewish expatriates Leo and Gertrude Stein became the primary patrons of Picasso and Braque. But how accurately do these Jewish crusaders represent the Victorian middle class?

By recording without discussing the preponderance of Jews among nineteenth-century cultural patrons, Gay skirts a topic that deserves a book in itself. Like artists, Jews were a foreign, potentially dangerous presence. Was not their patronage of art a symptom of exclusion or even revolt, rather than bourgeois good will? Does the middle class deserve credit for the anonymous Jewish businessman who offered Oscar Wilde a home on his yacht, or for Gertrude Stein? Gay's analysis of the exclusion of Jews from Munich's cultural life is painfully euphemistic: "In sharp contrast to Manchester's citizens, who had integrated their German middle-class newcomers, Munich's burghers had evidently failed to acquire sufficient self-confidence by 1848 to escape a certain xenophobia."

Despite his ostensible Freudianism, Gay ignores the psychic dynamic of anti-Semitism as it affected the arts. But even without the horrors of hindsight, "a certain xenophobia," whether or not it was motivated by low self-confidence, was rampant, and not only in Munich, as one symptom of the collective meanness from which Gay wants to exonerate the middle class. Maladjusted as Flaubert may have been, he would have described more acutely this savage dimension of the bourgeois experience.

For, like Freudian repressions, Flaubert's accusations keep rearing up in *Pleasure Wars*, despite the author's contorted attempts to suppress them. He summons Tonio Kröger as a "friendly witness" against Flaubert. But *Tonio Kröger* is a study of paralyzing divisions; its protagonist is crippled with ambivalence, unable to identify with either blonde, robust bourgeois or with dark, alienated artists. For Gay, however, Mann's novella celebrates "the coexistence of strains and cooperation between self-proclaimed avant-garders and their reputed mortal foe, the bourgeoisie." Somehow, a confession of anguish turns into smug resolution.

Apart from the oddity of castigating a mid-nineteenth-century French writer through a German literary character of 1903, Thomas Mann is an unfortunate authority to enlist. Two recent biographies based on Mann's newly available diaries have replaced Gay's paragon of mature accommodation with a self-absorbed paterfamilias tormented by denied homoerotic longings, a radical manqué who spoke against totalitarianism too tepidly and too late. A psychoanalyst might analyze Mann's repressions, and a moralist might renounce his bad faith. Had Gay acknowledged the cruelty, the hypocrisy, and the self-mortification of figures like this newly understood Mann, he might have written an authentic account of the bourgeois experience, rather than the apologia that concludes his ambitious enterprise.

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The Reader Replies

JOSEPH EPSTEIN

From where I sit typing this letter I can see three shelves of spines of The American Scholar going back to the summer of 1975, when I first subscribed (and before the quarterly was redesigned to look, as Mr. Epstein described it, like a Dutch philological journal). I have read some of every issue, and many of them from start to finish, and a month does not go by that I don't take one out to reread some article for the simple pleasure of finding something that is invariably unexpected and rewarding.

It was hard to read Mr. Epstein's vade mecum and apologia pro sua vita ("I'm History," The American Scholar, Winter 1998) without a tear in the eye and a jerk of the heart. The American Scholar has been a beacon of clear thinking, fair-minded reporting, intellectual vigor, and lucid writing for almost three decades. We all know, as Wilde observed, that personalities move the age more than principles, and the personality behind each issue, what sutured the whole enterprise together with such clarity and wit and acumen, was clearly Mr. Epstein's.

I think that what has happened is shameful. I'm no Phi Beta Kappa, but if I were I would be outraged. But I think that Mr. Epstein can rest easy; what he has accomplished will be remembered long after these petty and small-minded feuds are forgotten.

Mr. Epstein's farewell essay takes as its motto "I interest myself." I'd like to propose one that I think is more appropriate. It was drawn on a beam above Montaigne's study and read "Nihil humani alieni mihi puto." In a loose translation, that reads "I consider nothing human alien to me." Mr. Epstein has covered the turf, and there are thousands of us who will be forever grateful.

David R. Godine
Jaffrey, New Hampshire

As a fifteen-year subscriber to The American Scholar, I was deeply disappointed to learn that Joseph Epstein will no longer be serving as editor. To me, Epstein *is* The American Scholar. His editorial insights give it a "class" seldom found elsewhere in this area of literature. How refreshing it has been to receive something in the mail that I might read, then place with pride on my coffee table to engender discussion with visiting colleagues and friends.

Although it appears that Mr. Epstein may have been treated somewhat shabbily in this matter, every controversial issue has at least two sides to it. It is not my intent to demand that my subscription be canceled. Rather, I will watch the journal with critical interest, to see if the new editor meets my standards of competence and good taste.

Edwin P. Pister
Bishop, California

I'm sure I share the regret of thousands of readers over Joseph Epstein's retirement as editor of The American Scholar.

I always turned to Mr. Epstein's Aristides essay first upon receiving a new issue. No matter what else the magazine contained, I knew that I could count on Aristides for a good—and often a great—read. Whatever the topic, he reminded me that much of what is best in life is to be found among individuals who attempt to live with integrity and good humor.

James Morice
St. Louis, Missouri

I am a botanist, retired after a thirty-five-year career with the National Park Service. I assume that with my background I am not the typical reader of The American Scholar. As a member of Phi Beta Kappa, I decided quite a few years ago to subscribe to the society-sponsored magazine. Over the years I have been wonderfully rewarded.

Joseph Epstein's magazine grew to be an important part of both my and my wife's intellectual lives. We have come to appreciate how its offerings have been protected from the stifling wash of political correctness, the sterility of the

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ever-growing "psychobabble," and the endless wallowing in victimhood that breeds so much divisiveness. We have found honest and uncluttered enjoyment in its pages.

ROBERT G. JOHNSSON
Frederick, Maryland

Having learned that Joseph Epstein was stepping down as editor of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, I felt that I must write to say how much I have enjoyed his Aristides column. I have felt in reading his column over the years that I have known him personally. He has seemed a very comfortable old friend, and I shall miss him.

FRANK E. TAPLIN, JR.
Princeton, New Jersey

Aristides' departure is a sad milestone. May your choice of his replacement be blessed!

PAUL GOOD
Herndon, Virginia

I was in my early twenties when Mr. Epstein took over the SCHOLAR, making me one of the younger readers he recollected having been asked about in his job interview, and in whom he affected to have no interest. I admit to many periods of "unrest"—political and otherwise—as an undergraduate, and I was more likely to read *Ramparts* or the *Nation* at that age. The old AMERICAN SCHOLAR had been around my house during my adolescence, but in those days I read it primarily for poetry. It was at some point during my first full-time job as an editor with a business news wire service that I picked up a new issue and discovered a guy called Aristides. This, I remember thinking, is what the human race ought to be doing with the gift of language. Mr. Epstein's essays consistently confirm that the study of great literature ought to help us live better lives, to reach the highest expression of humanity that our nature will allow.

HOLLY CANNON
La Crescenta, California

I subscribed to THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR largely because of Joseph Epstein's essays. They were a delicious experience in cultivation. Mr. Epstein made the act of reading important in its own right. Though I may cavil at his rejection of *chair* (not necessarily just a figure of speech when referring to chairmen), it has been a joy to meet a fine, fine writer through print.

Mr. Epstein ends his last essay with the word *thanks*. Thanks to him, too.

RICHARD BURWELL
Franconia, New Hampshire

A. J. LIEBLING AT WORK

Although, like most people, I knew A. J. Liebling only through his writing, the final sentence of Dan Pinck's essay ("A. J. Liebling at Work," Winter 1998) reminds me of an incident that took place some forty years ago in the lobby of a Manhattan apartment house. The building, designed by Stanford White, was at that time Mr. Liebling's home.

It was also where my girlfriend lived. One day, as I was leaving with her, a man preceded us across the lobby but lingered patiently to hold the old-fashioned heavy iron door for us. The gentleman, who had a round face and was wearing a dark topcoat, nodded and tipped his derby hat while continuing to hold the door until we were safely through it.

When we were out on the sidewalk, my girlfriend whispered, "That's Mr. Liebling. The writer." Not wanting to admit that I had only a shaky idea of who Mr. Liebling was, I nodded knowingly.

As Mr. Pinck reminds us in his final sentence, Joe Liebling truly was "a sweet man."

ALBERT ASHFORTH
Brooklyn, New York

DARKER THAN DARKNESS

Joel Smith's account of his depression ("Darker than Darkness," Autumn 1997) was extremely moving. Anyone who has the strength to come forward and describe a truly terrifying illness (dismissed by too many people as simply a lack of character) should be supported. However, I must object to his dismissal of those who, in his judgment, have not suffered enough.

My depressive episodes would, I suspect, be considered "candy-ass" by Mr. Smith—a term a friend of Mr. Smith's applies in the essay to William Styron's memoir *Darkness Visible*. After all, I haven't even been hospitalized, let alone had electroshock or made a serious suicide attempt, the experiences that apparently make one a veteran in Mr. Smith's eyes.

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I can understand Mr. Smith's desire to dramatize the difference between depression and the blues. Most people simply feel that depression is a bad case of everyday sadness, when indeed it is a disease, a breakdown, a tempest in the brain. We don't recover from it without help from professionals and from those around us, and without great personal courage. But I can't understand his contemptuous attitude toward Styron—and by extension toward myself and millions of others who suffer greatly, though not sufficiently to suit Mr. Smith. As he notes, "No one really knows how dark it is for someone else." Perhaps some of us have been lucky enough to find good treatment early. Styron, Art Buchwald, Kathy Cronkite, Kay Jamison, Mr. Smith, and others who have talked publicly about their depression all deserve our respect and support; we don't have to start pushing each other out of the nest.

I'm afraid that the logical extension of Mr. Smith's argument is that anyone who is hopeful of recovery is simply not depressed enough. That way of thinking gets us nowhere.

RICHARD O'CONNOR
Lakeville, Connecticut

Joel P. Smith replies: I apologize. Two points have been confused and I, in some substantial measure, am responsible.

Did I say that depression should be graded, the more serious being in some sense the more worthy? No. On the contrary, I said no one knows how badly someone else hurts. It is certainly plausible—in principle, anyway—that Mr. Styron's depression of several months was more painful than mine of many, many years. I added that we veterans know how inhumane it is to try to top one another with war stories.

But didn't I also say that Mr. Styron's experience, brief as it was (and cosseted as he was by his wife and friends), poorly prepared him to write about depression as it is experienced by most other people? Yes, I did.

It is one thing for Mr. Styron to write about *his* depression, something else for him to generalize about depression as an illness. His generalizations rankle veterans because he's not been where we've been. Worse by far, many of Mr. Styron's generalizations, elegantly wrought with Styronian magic, are wrong, just plain wrong. Consider the conclusion of his book: "For those who have dwelt in depression's dark wood, and known its inexplicable agony, their return from the abyss is not unlike the ascent of the poet, trudging upward and upward out of hell's black depths and at last emerging into what he saw as 'the shining world.' There, whoever has been restored to health has almost always been restored to the capacity for serenity and joy, and this may be indemnity enough for having endured the despair beyond despair."

Most depressed people, as well as their families and friends—and millions of them have read *Darkness Visible*—want to believe these points. But they aren't true. Depressed people return fearfully and tentatively to life as they knew it. There isn't a "shining world." Nor is there a cosmic reward system which says that a person who has endured hell has earned serenity and joy. And contrary to Mr. Styron's insinuation, the worse the depression, the more probable its return. So it's a lovely paragraph, a masterly construction. It is also, however, a contrivance, a happy ending, which is how it worked out for Mr. Styron, a fortunate fellow.

Finally, regarding Dr. O'Connor's suggestion that those of us who write about our experiences with mental illness should be shielded from criticism, or at least from one another—I wish to remain polite, and so I shall only say I can't remember more vehemently disagreeing with a particular proposition.

PARADELLE FOR SUSAN

Perhaps I somehow missed the point when I examined Billy Collins's poem "Paradelle for Susan" (Summer 1997). I was expecting that within a rigid formula defining the exact set of words to be used, those words would be rearranged and recombined to form meaningful, grammatical lines of poetry. I was therefore disappointed to find that the tail end of each sixth line turns into a "trash bin" for words left over that didn't fit in properly.

Then I began to discover apparent violations of the formula. I understand that the set of words in lines five and six of each of the first three stanzas should be exactly the set of words in lines one and three (or two and four) of the same stanza. But the *numbers* of words don't even match! In stanza one, lines one plus three contain 17 words; lines five plus six contain 16.

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Likewise, in stanzas two and three, the numbers are 18 versus 20 and 16 versus 17. The total number of words in the final stanza (53) *is* equal to the sums of the number of words in lines five and six in all the preceding stanzas, but *is not* equal to the sums of the number of words in lines one and three in the preceding stanzas.

I then examined specific words. In the first stanza, the word "of" appears in the first line; not in the fifth or sixth. In the second stanza, the word "the" appears once each in the first and third lines, but twice in the fifth plus sixth lines. Likewise, the word "to" appears twice in the first line; three times in the fifth plus sixth. In the third stanza, the word "you" appears in the sixth line; but not in the first four lines. In the final stanza, the words "flew" and "was" appear, although they are not in any prior stanza. The word "to" appears three times, but only twice in the first and third lines of the prior stanzas. The word "of" appears; it is in no prior fifth or sixth line, although it is in the first line of stanza one. Finally, the word "flies" does not appear, although it is in the third stanza.

Unless I badly missed the point, I don't find "Paradelle for Susan" to be a very impressive example of the tour-de-force that a paradelle purports to be.

ROGER IDE
Livermore, California

Billy Collins replies: Guilty as charged. Not only does Mr. Ide have me dead to rights, I am a little surprised that he was the only reader to notice the flaws—and I admit that there are more than a few!—in my paradelle. I only hope that his heart is as soft as his eye is sharp and that he will forgive my lapses. I should not have to remind him of the difference between erring and forgiving.

The paradelle is a stern mistress. Mr. Ide's letter only reminds me of how severe her frown of disapproval must be at my attempt. I want to assure Mr. Ide that I was not foolhardy enough to think that I could completely satisfy her demands. I had hoped only to do the best I could. It was very kind of the SCHOLAR to publish the results, however flawed. My reach perhaps exceeded my grasp in this case, but I did try, and without such literary exertions, poetry (the arts, I dare say), instead of evolving, would stagnate.

I invite—no, make that *challenge*—Mr. Ide to dig in and try his own paradelle. He does seem to have available the kind of spare time the form requires, and perhaps once he is in the grip of its stringencies he will think more kindly of me and my modest attempt to write what has continued to elude poets over the centuries—the "perfect paradelle."

ERRATA

The editors apologize for three errors in the Winter 1998 issue.

In the contributor's note for John Higham, one of the participants in "Teaching American History: A Forum," Professor Higham should have been described as the editor, not the author, of *Civil Rights and Civil Wrongs: Black-White Relations Since World War II.* He was misidentified as the result of an editorial error.

In Christopher Clausen's review of *Inventions of the March Hare: Poems 1909–1917,* by T. S. Eliot, several words were omitted from a sentence on page 183, confusing its meaning. The sentence should have read: "The most significant discontinuity of style and substance in Eliot's work came not between his early unpublished work and the *Prufrock* volume, but more than ten years later, after his conversion to Christianity—above all, with World War II."

The biography of Gertrude Stein mentioned in Brenda Wineapple's article, "Gertrude Stein: Woman Is a Woman Is," should have been identified in the contributor's note. It is *Sister Brother: Gertrude and Leo Stein;* it includes a transcription of the manuscript whose discovery Professor Wineapple described in her article.

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THE PODIUM

On Teaching

MAYNARD MACK

Like most of you here tonight, I think of myself first and last as a teacher. My lifelong conviction has been that scholarship is one means to a nobler end. Though some of us are luckier than others in our access to great libraries, sabbaticals, fellowships, and travel grants (a situation one likes to think will alter for the better with the spread of the computer library), the playing field vastly levels in the classroom, where we engage in our central task: what we are paid to do, what our students and their parents expect of us, what—when we do it well—we are looked up to for. In the classroom, all any of us has to work with are a text (worthy of our mettle, let us hope), whatever background reading our often frantic schedules will allow, and—the crucial ingredient—the power of our own feeling-imagination at its most intense (what Wordsworth calls "reason in its most exalted form") to combine with the feeling-imagination of the writer in such a way as to kindle the feeling-imagination of those who come to us to learn. From such interactions, rather than from the passive transmission of information, come those moments of revelation, however rare, that change lives.

—from a speech delivered on December 28, 1996, in Washington, D.C., accepting the Modern Language Association of America's first award for lifetime scholarly achievement

Maynard Mack, Sterling Professor Emeritus of English at Yale, is the author of *Alexander Pope: A Life* and an editor of *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces*. In "The Podium," the SCHOLAR will regularly publish excerpts from speeches.

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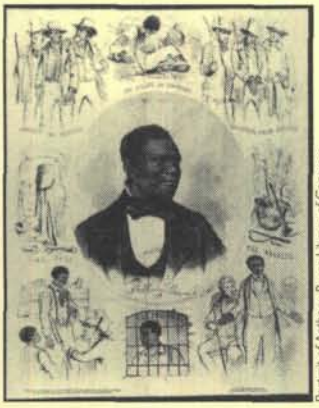
ALBERT J. VON FRANK



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